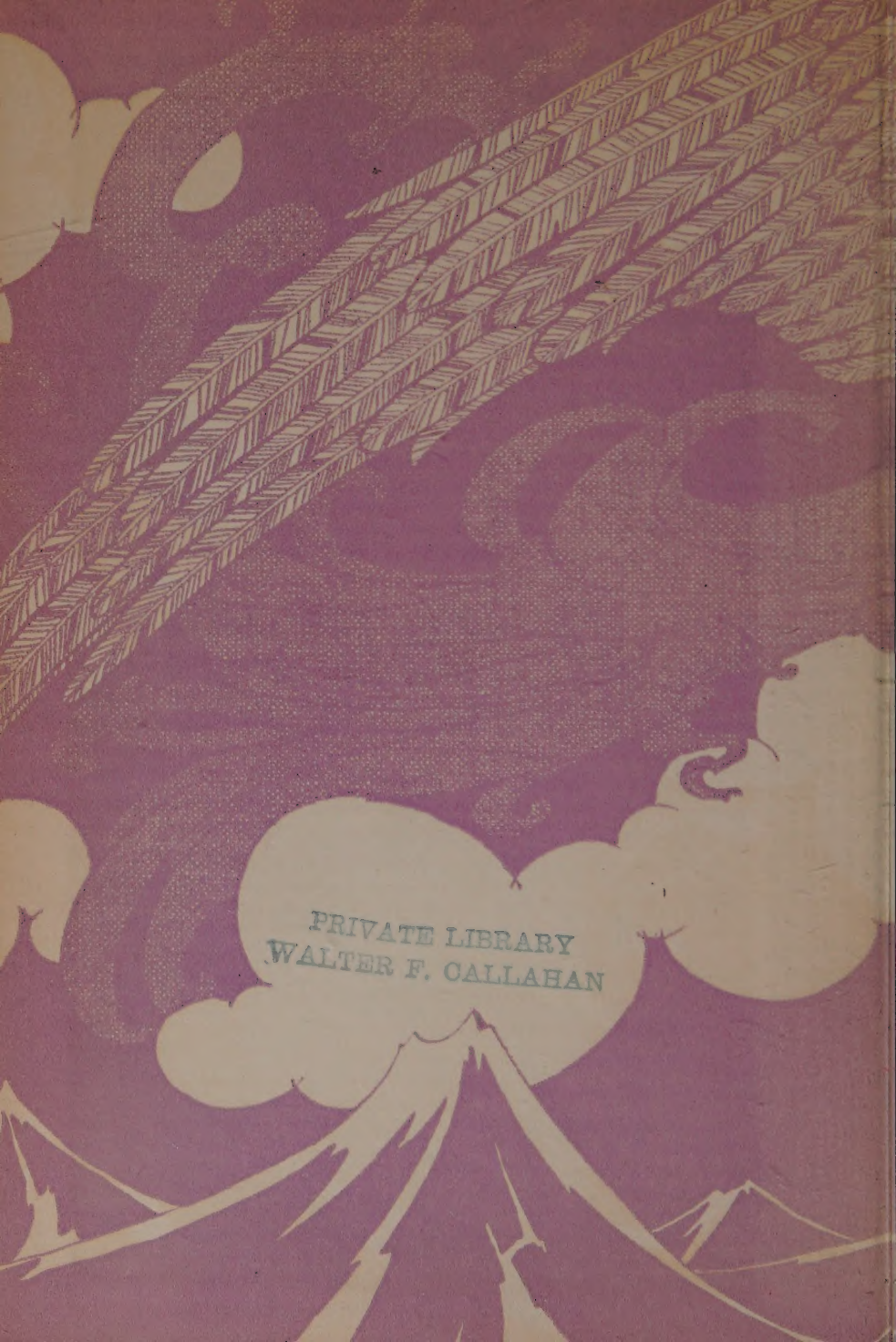




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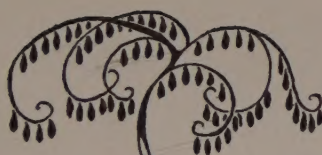




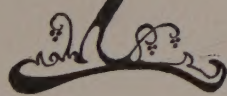
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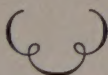
*The Virtuous Reforms of
Confucius Therein ~
Something About His Rival
Sage Lâu-tsze and More
About That Deplorable
Vagabond and Clown*

~ Mong Pi ~

By MAURICE MAGRE

Translated by Eliot Fay and

Illustrated by Kate Rowland



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TO THE MEN OF THE WEST

HEAR me, O men of the West, I have lived for thousands of years, I have seen planets which exist no longer, and I reaped the ooze out of the primitive waters.

Men of the West, I learned writing and the art of making books with tablets of bamboo when you were still walking on all fours and eating the flesh of your dead.

Men of the West, I sought Truth and loved it a thousand times more ardently than you; and if today there are players on the harp, men who number the stars, and others who trace figures in stone, it is by means of the sweat of my brow.

Men of the West, you are proud of your ships and your engines, of your inventions and of your God. But in a thousand ways *I* have been transforming matter for centuries, and when I saw God I was not dismayed.

TO · THE · MEN · OF · THE · WEST

Men of the West, you know nothing of me, because my knowledge is secret and my wisdom is silent. Beware of the disaster caused by him who too quickly reveals that which should remain hidden.

Men of the West, do not hasten. Upon the mountain of Tay Chang I have sat down to wait for you. Far away I see you coming. The sand is tossed up and falls back to earth. The nations are dispersed. But the wise man's word remains.

Men of the West, heed the wise men, the great wise men of ancient China. While they lived they were unimportant, and no one knew that they were wise. For such is the law. Truth is invisible, and we breathe it without being aware of its presence.

Men of the West, this invisible Truth was born on yellow soil; it ate rice and slept in the shade of the blue mulberry-tree; and we transmit it modestly.

Men of the West, heed the wise men, the great wise men of ancient China.

Book One

THE YOUTH OF
THE WISE MEN





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THE GUARDIAN OF THE HOUSE OF CONFUCIUS

IN winter, at the second moon of the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Ling Wang, in the mountainous Kingdom of Lu, under the flat roof of a little bamboo hut, was born K'ung, Fu-Tsze, whom the barbarous men of the West call Confucius.

Chang, guardian of the little bamboo hut, was busy plastering on the door paper images of the household gods, when a maid servant brought the child for him to carry it up toward the light of the rising sun.

And Chang, who attained extreme old age, outliving Confucius, told pilgrims later that the marvelous child had, at birth, a skull shaped like an amphitheater, and that it had bowed again and again with fitting solemnity, to express its

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precocious liking for the prescribed salutations and obligatory rites.

Chang told many other tales besides. But he told them laughingly, for, in spite of his simplicity, Confucius had taught him the principal truths that he professed.

Thus Chang was aware that reason is superior to all else, and that the world goes round without miracles, without divine intervention, but simply in logical and rhythmic sequence.

For many years he had heard devils tramping at night among the wooded hills, and Way, the water-serpent, sighing sadly on the bank of the river. But he had been delivered from his fears. No more amulets against evil spirits! No more entreaties to wandering ghosts! Long ago he had flung away the worthless talismans supposed to ward off sickness. And what a joy it was, after being thought a fool for so many years, to become at last a wise man, free from superstition! What a joy, indeed!

Yet because of this, his face, which, in spite of old age, resembled a great moony pumpkin, sometimes assumed an expression of emptiness and of despair. For he knew also that, in the mysterious Kingdom of the Dead, he would no longer

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be the guardian of a little bamboo hut, and that he would never again behold his well-beloved master, who now was rotting within the four wooden walls of his coffin, under a little mound sprinkled with narcissus flowers.

PLUM-TREE-EAR

AND fifty-four years earlier, in the mountainous Kingdom of Thsoo, a poor old peasant woman had become the wife of a coarse farmer. They were together but a single night, upon which a great comet appeared over the mountainous Kingdom of Thsoo, causing red and blue flames to shoot over the mica scales of the rocks, and broad luminous bands to streak along the surface of the rivers.

They lay in a furrow of the field all during that splendid night; and when, in the morning, the comet disappeared, the miserable farmer was dead.

The poor old woman took to the roads; from house to house she went, knocking at each door and asking to be taken in as a servant. But later, when her pregnancy was visible, the master whose rice-fields she was weeding became angry and sent her away. She wandered for a long time hither and thither, wretched and without food.

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And on the night when a shooting-star split the sky of the Kingdom of Thsoo, she fell down under a plum-tree and gave birth to a son.

The child's hair and eyebrows were as white as snow; his glance had unusual depth, because some of the light of the shooting-star had remained there.

The mother gave to her son the name of the tree that had sheltered her. But presently she noticed that the lobes of his ears were very long, so she called him Plum-tree-Ear. Thenceforth she walked with pride, carrying the child in her arms and showing him to passers-by. The good folk, astonished at his white hair and eyebrows, named him Lâu-tsze (Old-man-child).

All babes, indeed, are like old men, on account of their wrinkled faces, but this one alone showed signs of the wisdom of age, and had in his eyes the light of a shooting-star; for he was Lâu-tsze the Divine, the Supreme, who had been chosen to carry secret Truth to eternal China, the land of men who are at once subtle and childish, industrious and meek, superstitious and shrewd.

THE TWO WISE MEN OF CHINA

TWO sublime men came almost at the same time into the rice-colored land of China, one being the man of the white poppy, and the other the man of the black poppy. Why did two men of such sublimity come almost at the same time? It would be more reasonable to ask why so many millions have come who are utterly lacking in sublimity.

Alas! The human race is like a snail that has been commanded to creep ten thousand times around the base of a huge mountain. The end of the journey is so far away that it would seem natural for the snail to take things easily, traveling without haste as he leaves behind him his trail of froth. But, no, there is some strange law which compels him to struggle to go always faster and faster.

In the clay-colored land of China there are at present two Masters because there are two Truths: one which rushes straight to heaven,

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and another which seeks its nutriment in the soil—an ideal Truth and a practical Truth, Truth like a wild swan and Truth like a faithful dog.

That is why Lâu-tsze sits on the mountain, deep in consideration of his own soul, while Confucius talks with princes and covets honors in order that through him may be honored the virtue that he represents. Or the supposed virtue; for it is possible that the wise man's meditation is simply a philosophical form of egoism.

In China, land the color of heaped barley, two Truths have been enunciated. The buds continue to burst, the vapors continue to rise from the ditches in the rice-fields, the kingfisher continues to plume himself on a willow-tree; but more than one scholarly scribe has dropped his brush to look at the sky with astonishment.

For it is an impenetrable mystery that there should exist a day and a night, goodness and evil, wisdom and folly, springtime and winter, a concave side and a convex side; an impenetrable mystery that there should exist in saffron-colored China a man of the white poppy and a man of the black poppy.

CONFUCIUS' MOTHER AND THE UNICORN

IT IS in vain that men of science try to dispel the mysteries of life. They say that a great genius is born after the manner of ordinary individuals. But, after all, is not everything miraculous, even the simple fact of birth?

The sub-prefect of the town of Tsioo, desiring a male child, had married to this end a young woman of good family. And the fruit of this loveless marriage was Confucius. Men never notice the phenomenon whereby out of the union of two human beings a living child is born; yet they are astonished at things much less wonderful.

On her morning of conception Cheng-Tsay, the young woman of good family, was walking down a little path under the cinnamon-trees, thinking the conventional thoughts of surprise and resignation inspired by her condition.

A unicorn burst through a juniper-thicket and

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approached Cheng-Tsay. It came so near that she was able to fasten a silk ribbon to its single horn. Then she tried to caress it, but the unicorn sped nimbly away, and Cheng-Tsay perceived that it had left at her feet a tiny tablet of jade. On the tables was written:

*A child will be born, pure as crystal, who
will be a king, but without a kingdom.*

Cheng-Tsay, as she walked back with the tablet along the little path under the cinnamon-trees, wondered at this omen and was proud. But, being sensible, she wondered much less than she had over what had befallen her at the hands of the sub-prefect of Tsioo. . . .

And when, nine months later, she learned that two winged Dragons had coiled round the house while she suffered the pangs of childbirth, and that the five sacred Patriarchs, spirits from the five heavenly planets, had descended into her courtyard to confer concerning celestial matters, she looked down at her belly, considering it as the symbol of a mystery which was vulgar yet portentous, a mystery even more mysterious than the presence of the two winged Dragons and the five Patriarchs of the planets.

MONG PI

THE sub-prefect of Tsioo said with pride, energy, and solemnity:

"I have a son."

But in his heart he knew very well that he had two.

The town of Tsioo clung to the side of a hill. The handsomest houses were on the heights; and as one descended the gardens became smaller, while the roofs instead of being covered with slate, were made of plaited straw. According to a strict commandment all the streets had painted paper lanterns every one hundred and twenty *che*. Only one street had no lanterns; and it was that one which had the greatest need of light, being a street of ill fame, in that part of the town which lost itself in the valley.

So far as this street was concerned, the sub-prefect of Tsioo disobeyed his own commands; for regularly, when the moon was new, he went there furtively at nightfall, gliding down with

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rapid steps. At such times, preferring not to be seen, he had given secret orders to the police that no lantern should be lighted there.

"Evil," he said, "should remain in the dark."

Under cover of the shadows evil men assembled to drink rice-wine in shops that reeked with opium; women squatted on the doorsteps; and misery, lying low by day, came forth to suffer as it chased joy in the dark.

The sub-prefect was ashamed of himself; but a blind force urged him to satisfy his desire in the house of a poor creature named Lu, who offered pleasure as humble as her own soul.

After a long series of visits on the part of the sub-prefect, Lu gave birth to a child. He was somewhat deformed and extremely homely, with a certain expression of stupidity in his face. But Lu loved him with an intense love. Beneath the veil of surface ugliness, the pure soul of a mother can divine that true beauty which has nothing to do with facial characteristics.

"O sub-prefect of Tsioo," she said at the first new moon after the birth of her child, "here is your son, whom I have named Mong Pi."

The sub-prefect was very angry at these words and went away never to return. Thenceforth

the ill-famed street at the bottom of the town had its painted paper lanterns like the rest.

The child's face became less stupid on account of the mother's love that it reflected. All day long Lu held him in her arms, but when she drank she would set him down on the ground. And since the single room she occupied was in a steeply sloping part of the street, the child would roll down to the other side and bump himself against a bamboo wall. Then she would bring him back to the same spot, whereupon he would roll down as before, until at last he became more deformed than ever. He could not even take a few steps without swaying to and fro. But the gods, who watch over miserable children more carefully than over children of the rich, preserved him always.

Lu was a humble woman. Mong Pi was a humble child. The sub-prefect of Tsioo turned away angrily whenever he met them in the street. Mong Pi never dared to approach him. Yet sometimes he followed at a distance when the sub-prefect walked in the country; and in the evening he would stand in front of his father's house to watch the windows as they were lighted up. The sub-prefect of Tsioo was highly irritated by this childish shadow that dogged his own.

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On the night when Confucius was born, the night when the winged Dragons soared and when the five Patriarchs descended, Mong Pi was sitting in the road. But he saw neither the Dragons nor the Patriarchs. He saw only Chang on the threshold raising toward the sky a little child.

"May that child," he said, "be placed upon very flat soil."

Then he ran quickly away. Never more did he follow in his wanderings the sub-prefect of Tsioo.

CONFUCIUS BOWS

ALL through his childhood the small Confucius bowed. He bowed to the ancestral tablets in the shadow of the incense-perfumed Miao; he bowed to his mother when she left her room at dawn, scented with lavender. He watched for his father to bow to him at the door when he came in out of the dusty street; he studied to imitate the bows that grown persons made to one another; he bowed to people passing in the street—if they wore embroidered robes; he bowed to his playmates, teaching them to bow in return; he bowed to the old cypresses, whose majesty and straightness he admired; he bowed to the rosebuds for their perfume, to the stones for their solidity, to the sky for its mutability. And when he began to realize the noble qualities of his own soul, he would have liked to bow to himself by the way of honoring his budding virtue.

His father, the sub-prefect, died; he bowed

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before his tomb. Hard times came; he bowed to poverty. Then he grew old enough to study; and he bowed to his school.

Modesty, industry, and gentleness were his daily attributes. Politeness seemed to him the highest expression of human worth. All its forms were dear to him, and the very sound of the word "polite" filled him with the deepest joy. All customs appeared venerable to him, purely because they were customs. All rites must be observed, he thought; because their repeated observance forms a chain never to be broken. All forms of respect were good, since all were venerable. But above everything else he honored decorum and restraint, always remembering that they were to be honored in a restrained and decorous manner.

When he was about fifteen years old this habit of bowing had given his body a slight forward inclination. His skull had lost its strange amphitheatrical form and assumed a shape of normality. He had regular features, rather slow motions, and a certain studied precision in his speech. A mist veiled his eyes, and frequently their lids were lowered to avoid displaying the frankness of his gaze; for he knew already that

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excessive frankness could be a handicap in dealings among men.

He had achieved a reputation for filial piety, love of study, and respectfulness; and as might have been expected, he was encouraged by his renown to cultivate these qualities still further. Sometimes he would astonish his mother by interrupting his meals to cast himself at her feet. He used so much incense on the altar of his ancestors that he had to pay for it by selling certain jewelry which, after all, was not of a sacred character. He formed the habit, when someone came to his door, of rushing out, flapping his arms like wings, to show that he was overcome with a feeling of politeness.

The first time he saw a comet he was obliged to take to his bed, because this luminous manifestation disrupted habit, offended order, destroyed harmony. But after three days of illness he got up hurriedly, left the house in spite of his mother's prayers, and climbed the hill above Tsioo to bow solemnly to the comet. It had disappeared; but Confucius meditated long upon this celestial irregularity, this divine fantasy.

THE BOOK SUPREME

STRAIGHT as an arrow stood Lâu-tsze while Confucius bowed, straight as the soaring cypress, straight as winged thought, straight as the upright figure of a man.

He had been wretched in his childhood; he had been a herdsman on the desolate plains of Thsoo; he had tramped the highways and waited at the gates of towns for the sentinels to fall asleep, that he might enter. But always he had stood erect.

He had walked in the desert when his feet were those of a little boy, walked for whole days without food or drink. And he had perceived in the sadness of the sands the Kwei, who had transfixed him with the gaze of their milky eyeballs and tried to seize him with their insect-like antennae. He had confronted these demons boldly; between the low-hung clouds and the shifting sands he had always held himself erect.

A dealer in buffaloes conceived a hatred of

him because of his kindly nature, and chained him to a stake for purposes of ingenious torture. For if the good attract the good, and if evil men are attracted by evil men, it is also true that the good exasperate the evil and render them exquisitely vindictive. Yet in the presence of the buffalo-dealer and beneath the blows of his bamboo cane, always he remained unbroken.

As a youth he had known the deepest human suffering: namely, that of wishing to learn, of feeling one's mind ready, like a blossom, to unfold, and to be without books. To have no books, and therefore to be kept down to the level of inferior men, away from the beautiful things one loves. But even after peeping over the garden-walls behind which scholars with high foreheads sat discussing lofty subjects, he had not let his heart be broken, but had continued to stand erect.

For since the world began it has been an inexorable law that he who is to travel fast and far must first suffer in lowly places. He must cleave upward like a grain of sprouting wheat that pushes through the soil from which it gathers sustenance. He must run the gamut of human contacts without the protection of a father and

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a mother. He must himself distinguish, by means of the touchstone of his own soul, between the impure and the pure. In this world of changing shadows, he must seek out the true light which, when it is discovered, nevermore goes out. He must learn without a teacher, find his trail without a guide. Ugliness may be his bride, he may be marked with beggars' pox or have a skin disfigured by the mange. But always he must stand up straight.

Through his desire to read the books of men he was inspired to read another book, which was wide open before his gaze. Innumerable were its characters, but one might decipher them without being a scholar. He read the text of the clouds in the sky. He harkened to the mutterings of hoary mountains. He listened to the fresh grass whispering in the valley. By wading in the river he learned that the whole world is but a moving mirror.

He became the possessor of secrets only to be known by those with minds uncluttered by the specious science of men. In the eyes of animals are to be found some of the deep thoughts that are the basis of ultimate Truth. The appearance of certain plants, the sad aspect of certain stones,

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taught him that there are no differences save those of form, that all living things are essentially the same, though placed at different points in the vast cycle.

And he read so deeply in this great illuminated book whose pages one was not even obliged to turn, that when at last he obtained access to the bamboo tablets bound with silken thread, he perceived that their science was merely what he had already studied, traced in plainer characters; and then he knew that the only real wisdom is that which one discovers for oneself.

THE PALACE OF DELECTABLE THOUGHTS

AT Lo Yang the Emperor King Wang, of the Choo dynasty, possessed a venerable stone palace which he thought too old and too sad to live in. It was called the Palace of Earth-Spirits. At its corners were four great blocks of black marble upon which was graven the name of Fo Hi. It was surrounded by a garden filled with boxwood and cypress-trees.

On the other bank of the river Hoang-Ho, opposite the Palace of Earth-Spirits, the Emperor King Wang caused to be built the Palace of Delectable Thoughts. Its roof was of blue tiles, its walls of colored china, and it had five terraces of azure-veined white marble with columns as slender as the stamina of flowers.

The Emperor had the Palace of Delectable Thoughts surrounded with a garden containing every kind of flower known to China, and even some curious blossoms brought home by travelers from the West.

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He caused his garden to be strewn with dreamy bowers and with jade pools whose crystal bottoms reflected the faces of those who gazed into their mysterious depths. Also the garden was laid out with silver birch and golden lemon-trees.

The Emperor King Wang had, in his youth, dreamed of bringing into subjection all the feudal kings in China, and of making the Empire once more as powerful as it had been in the days of the first Choos, his ancestors. But through some queer metamorphosis his mind had become soft—a little softer every day, and he could no longer accomplish any but the slightest mental effort. He turned his attention to the arbitration of quarrels between girls who played the lute, to the quality of paper fans, and to a new sort of case for fingernails. His condition was such that he had a headache at the very sight of the great sheets of bamboo upon which industrious kings had traced out ceremonies, hymns, records of war and of national progress. And he went to bed immediately whenever by chance his fingers encountered a book upon a shelf, because of the fatigue communicated to his body by the occult influence of the book.

To the other side of the Hoang-Ho, into the Palace of Earth-Spirits, behind the darkling rows

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of cypresses and boxwood thickets, he bade his servants carry the archives of the Empire, the sacred books, and the writings of the old philosophers, in order not to see them ever again or hear them mentioned in his presence. But the scholars at his court declined the title of Guardians of Literary Treasures, believing that, if they accepted, they would fall into disgrace and no longer be permitted to discuss trifles with their master.

The Emperor King Wang suffered from indecision, and this form of suffering was especially painful to him. It became acute when several of his mandarins persisted in urging him to grant an audience which had long ago been promised. They wished him to receive a man of great wisdom who was living wretchedly in Lo Yang and whose name was Lâu-tsze. This man, uncertified by any of the recognized institutions of learning, claimed to have personal ideas of considerable depth concerning the origin of the world. The mandarins had often heard him speak and they admired him highly. They thought in their zeal that the Emperor could not afford to miss the opportunity of meeting this man and listening to his remarks.

Although King Wang was frivolous, he did

not admit it. He understood that a ruler cannot be called great unless he encourages the advancement of learning among his subjects. This had been done by the Choos and the Changs and the Hias and by all those who had governed China since Hoang Ti. Nor was his own policy different from theirs. Had he not installed his books in the venerable Palace of Earth-spirits? He could not, just then, interview the extraordinary man called Lâu-tsze. His mind was entirely occupied with a collection of caterpillars. Nevertheless, he wished to honor an intelligence that had been developed independently of the schools. The Guardianship of Literary Treasures was vacant. He would bestow it upon this sage. An audience would be unnecessary. And he could go to see him at some time in the future. O the joy of devoting oneself to caterpillars, after being rid of two annoyances!

THE PALACE OF EARTH-SPIRITS

WHEN Lâu-tsze entered the Palace of Earth-Spirits the sun had just risen. It was gilding the tops of the cypresses, the boxwood hedge, the surface of the river, and, on the other bank, the Palace of Delectable Thoughts in the midst of its flower-beds, its pools of jade, its jasper bridges, and its towers of chiseled silver. Beyond, the town reposed like an ocean of colored playthings bordered by ramparts, with its flat, five-sided temples, its squares left open for public ceremonies, and its many bridges hunched like so many stone camels.

Lâu-tsze contemplated the spacious halls wherein were heaped the "books" of polished, cord-bound wood. He manipulated the locks of the chests containing the most valuable tablets. He fingered lovingly the rolls of bark, snuffing up with eagerness their sacred dust. An odor of moldiness and age arose, which seemed to him more heady than that of the aromatic valleys

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where seethes in spring the sap of living plants. But the realization of his dream had come too late. Those secrets that he had so deeply desired to find in books, he had since glimpsed through the mist of his meditations. He knew instinctively what he was about to learn. For dreams come true only when their realization no longer matters.

He stood in the presence of manifestations of man's greatness, the soul of ancient China revealed in writing. He was no longer master of himself. He flung wide his arms to enjoy physical contact with the substance whose spirit already was so dear to him. He gathered up whole armfuls of tablets, clasping them close to his heart. He caressed them with his wrinkled face and with his bony hands. He sank down upon the tiles, examining first one book, then another. He would have liked to read them all at once.

There were records a thousand years old, written in old-fashioned characters; and there were records of a race even earlier than the Chinese, written in letters that he could not understand. The sacred books of Yao and of Chun were composed of golden plates so nu-

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merous and so heavy that he could hardly lift them. He studied the book in which are explained the relations between our planet and the other celestial globes, the book of the five immutable laws and of the five duties, the book of Ta Nao containing the principles of arithmetic and of geometry, and the book which the Empress Looy Tsoo (whom men called the spirit of mulberry-trees and of silk-worms) wrote about the arts of spinning and of fashioning gowns. He read the stories of the ten wise men who had accompanied the Emperor Moo Wang on his journey to Mount Kwen Lun (called by the Indians, Meru), stories which confirmed his own theory that all knowledge comes from the West. He touched a jade tablet on which Emperor Fo Hi had traced the eight original diagrams, and handled ivory sheets containing sketches of the Ta Voo dances instituted by the fifteenth emperor to perpetuate the beauty of the human form. Also there were plans of towns, lists of meteorological phenomena, pictures of moons and comets, maps of the islands in the Eastern Sea, and the names of spirits and genii. Certain books were made of mysterious metals so thin as to be translucent,

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their printed letters appearing like armies of intelligent insects. And over the features of Lâu-tsze, hardened as they were by privation and solitude, descended at last that sweetness which can be imprinted by gratitude alone.

He got up, and going to the threshold of the Palace of Stone, he looked beyond the city at the semicircle of hills covered with bluish mulberry-trees and peach-trees pink with blossoms. And he said:

"I thank the first-born of the ancient peoples. Each of them brought patiently a grain of knowledge to the poor storehouse of humanity. They founded a great treasure. And now I may touch it, see it, possess it. But the most precious stone is to be found only by him who searches diligently. With my lidless eyes I shall seek it among the unnumbered characters of these books. Perhaps I shall find it. But even if I do find it, I shall not be able to bequeath it to another. For each man must search and discover it for himself. May many be favored in the quest!"

And then he felt about him the presence of many beings. It seemed as if, between the rows of cypresses, austere thinkers were walking in meditation. He could descry neither their faces

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nor their forms precisely, but he was certain of the passing of grave persons clad in robes, who walked erect and pensive as the cypress-trees, with folded arms. These people trod the sand without a sound; their breathing was inaudible. And yet they left behind them a perceptible trail of thought.

Lão-tsze remained for a long time with his eyes fixed upon the garden where drops of dew glistened like thousands of radiant pearls. Then the noises which rose from the awakening town and the increasing warmth of the risen sun dispelled his illusion.

At that moment the Emperor, dressed in a gown of white silk, came down the terraces of his garden and reached the river's bank. He had been unable to sleep, because he knew that at dawn two tame ibises would be frolicking among the reeds; and all through the night he had worried lest he should miss the spectacle of their loves, from which he drew a childish joy.

He perceived, between the boxwood and the cypresses, the silhouette of Lão-tsze standing on the threshold of the Palace of Earth-Spirits. Lão-tsze observed the Emperor also, and for

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several minutes the sage and the monarch, separated by the width of the stream, contemplated each other in the light of the rising sun. Presently the Emperor indifferently turned away; and contrary to the most rudimentary principles of politeness, Lâu-tsze failed to fall upon his face, to touch the flagstones with his forehead. As usual, he stood erect, straight as the Earth-Spirits, his invisible brothers who haunted the ancient Palace of Books.

Book Two

CONFUCIUS

WEDS





THE BURIAL OF HUMBLE LU

AS Confucius was standing one evening in the doorway of his house, he saw coming toward him up one of the steep streets that climbed the hill of Tsioo a strange funeral procession.

Two porters were walking ahead, bearing on their shoulders a wooden coffin. The coffin could not have contained a very heavy body, for the porters seemed to carry it without any difficulty, and even tossed it about as if it had been a mere empty box. They were followed by a group of women with colored combs in their hair, whose painted lips and faces resembled masks spotted with blood. Confucius recognized them as low women who dwelt in the meanest street in the town.

And he perceived among them two tight-rope dancers, an old woman who had begged for years at the north gate of the town, and a grave "doctor" of Feng Shooey who professed,

for a few *sapecks*, to tell one's fortune. He thought the corpse must be that of a prostitute, since such burials were permitted to take place only at night. Indeed, he saw tacked on the coffin a symbolic cord to which was attached a copper disc bearing the royal seal, and that sort of certificate he had often seen granted by his father, the sub-prefect, stating that its possessor exercised the profession of a prostitute. Confucius was about to go in quickly and shut the door when his gaze was arrested by the enormity of what he now saw.

A clownish person, hideously deformed, was walking behind the coffin, leaning on the arm of one of the tight-rope dancers. He wore a white mourning-gown; but this gown, too long and too full, was obviously borrowed and was, furthermore, an article of underwear for a woman. This person, in whom Confucius did not immediately recognize Mong Pi, had red eyes and a tear-stained countenance; yet now and then he would stop, make a grimace, utter an ugly laugh, and cut a few grotesque capers behind the coffin. Then he would turn toward the tight-rope dancers, the astrologer, the beggar, and the other women, inciting them to imitate his movements.

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The dancers leaped into the air, the beggar-woman brandished her crutch, the grave doctor wagged his head to left and right, the painted women flashed their teeth and rolled their eyes in a fashion of tragi-comedy.

Confucius stood motionless on his door-step, the personification of outraged virtue. But Mong Pi, when he perceived him, seized the skirt of his white gown, spread it out so as to cover that side of the coffin, and cried:

“Do not look in this direction! Do not look to the right!”

He seemed anxious to hide from the light body, carelessly carried by the porters, both the house of Confucius and the scandalized sage himself.

Because he was walking backwards and because his deformed legs were unsteady, he slipped and fell in a puddle of water, splashing mud in all directions. All the porters were drenched, and one of them got a wetting in the face. As he jumped backward the coffin slipped from his shoulder and fell to the ground.

There followed shouting and much confusion. The dancers picked up Mong Pi, whose white gown was covered with mud. The women crowded round the coffin, which had fallen

apart. And then, for a few moments, Confucius witnessed an extraordinary sight. Among the dilapidated pine boards was the thin body of a little woman. Her face expressed the chastity of marble and the pride of a statue. Everybody was impressed by the majesty of her slender figure. She was Lu, the prostitute, who, having been all her life a lowly creature, achieved in this twilit street, among the puddles of mud, an attitude of striking queenliness.

Then it was night. The cortège resumed its march. Confucius remained standing still upon his doorstep. He questioned a passer-by, who was known to him, as to the meaning of the remarkable scene he had just observed.

"It is poor Mong Pi," said the man, "burying Lu, his mother. It used to be her greatest pleasure to behold him acting the clown in the company of other scapegraces like himself. And so Mong Pi, who loved his mother, wished to entertain her once again before her spirit should be sealed beneath the ground. When your father was our sub-prefect he would never have permitted such a scandal. Things indeed are not as they were."

Confucius raised his eyes to the heavens. He

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beheld the star Ki glittering through a veil of murky storm-clouds. Thus, like Ki, could filial piety shine through clouds of coarseness, in the troubled sky of a man's soul.

THE BLUE STAR KI

ONE night Confucius awoke with a start. He sat up in astonishment, because ordinarily he slept the sound sleep of a healthy man with a clear conscience. A tempest was whistling over the roof-tops and rushing through the sloping streets of Tsioo.

But it was not the thunder or the rain which had roused Confucius. It was a singular human voice, coming from the hillside above his house.

Confucius thought that shouting at such a time and on the mountain was perhaps caused by some accident wherein his services might be of avail. So, getting up and dressing, he took a lantern and went out.

The voice came from that spot in the path where, a few days previously, Confucius had noticed among the junipers the traces of a new-made grave. He had stopped before this grave to read the inscription carved on the wooden tablet where the departed spirit was supposed to come and roost:

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Lu, the very gracious, humble, and unselfish woman, who loved all things in all the world.

Confucius descried a silhouette beside the mound, and from its limping gait he recognized Mong Pi. His white shirt so clung to him because of the rain that he appeared naked. Waving his stick in a threatening manner, he cried aloud:

“Go away! At once, or woe betide you!”

And with his stick he pretended to be striking at invisible creatures. Then he got down on his hands and knees in front of the tablet, and in a sorrowful and tender voice murmured consolingly:

“You have nothing more to fear. They have gone. And at any rate I am on guard. Come, sleep in peace.”

Confucius felt a freezing trickle of rain drip down his neck, but his heart was warm. He understood why Mong Pi was there, he perceived the meaning of his cries and of his solicitude. No doubt his mother, when she was alive, had been afraid of the storms that shook her little house in the low street. How much more frightened must she be, he thought, alone

under the melancholy mound beneath the juniper-trees. Mong Pi had come to protect her from the evil spirits which ride the winds.

Confucius was irresistibly drawn toward this young man whose filial devotion compensated for his sorry life. He approached him, raising the lantern to illuminate his face, and then, holding out his hands, he said:

"Mong Pi, henceforth I want you to be my brother."

Mong Pi stared at him in surprise, scratched his dripping head, and answered: "Brothers? Why, we have always been brothers."

And he began once more to beat the empty air with his staff, to threaten the onrushes of the rain, and to reassure the wooden tablet beneath which the humble presence of his mother must be shivering.

Confucius was puzzled by this reply, the meaning of which he could not understand. And while retracing his steps downward along the road that led back to his house, chilled and rain-soaked as he was, he reflected that the manifestation of virtue is sometimes as mysterious as the blue tint of the star Ki.

KI KIOO'S LUTE

KI KIOO was a maiden who greatly resembled the song-bird Tong Hoo Fang. Her parents, who were poor but noble, lived in a dilapidated house some distance from Tsioo.

Like Tong Hoo Fang, who flies aimlessly from branch to branch, she ran hither and thither throughout the dusty old house or through the weedy garden, appearing to be vastly busy over things which really had no importance whatever. She loved to play at dawn upon her lute, and when they scolded her for needlessly waking up the household, she retorted that music is only at its best a little before the break of day, a theory which seemed ridiculous to the various musicians who were consulted on the matter.

There was one, however, who agreed with her. At the hour when the summer nights began to whiten gradually, Ki Kioo, playing the lute in her garden, heard another lute-player approaching from the direction of the hill of Tsioo.

Along the road, planted alternately with

peach-trees and willows, Mong Pi came limping. He had just been playing his lute in front of the tablet which was inhabited by his mother's spirit. And he was on his way to a ruined wall where he knew that, by peeping through a gap, he could see a beautiful maiden's face illuminated by the mystery of music.

Sometimes Ki Kioo would accompany him upon her lute. And sometimes she would listen motionless, looking at this curious creature in a white gown who sat so still and played so sweetly on his lute. For Mong Pi never moved. He hoped that the girl would never know he limped. And so he waited till the shapes grew plainer and the girl had reentered the house before he set out along the road that was lined with peach-trees and willows.

For a long time Ki Kioo thought that the white-clad musician was a benevolent spirit from the fields. But one morning when she had stayed a little longer than usual, she was able to descry Mong Pi's face more plainly, and she noticed that in his eye there gleamed a tear. Then she thought it must be a man and not a spirit. At first she was disappointed, but from that day on she always played her best.

MARRIAGE

ONE day Ki Kioo's father called his daughter to him for a serious talk.

"The time has come when you must cease to be like the song-bird Tong Hoo Fang, and when you must marry. No doubt you have heard about Confucius, a young man of Tsioo, who has already won a fine reputation through his upright character and through his knowledge of history and canonical writings. To be sure, he has no fortune, but he belongs to an old and noble family, and it is even said—though this is uncertain—that there was an emperor among his ancestors. He has just been appointed by the King of Lu manager of the public granaries—not a very high position, of course; but at least it shows that he understands debits and credits and the money-value of the earth's treasure. Such knowledge was not given to your father; that is why he is a ruined man, with a daughter who is like a bird. Confucius came to ask for

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your hand in marriage, and I told him that of course you would accept. Already he has sent the customary note with eight characters designating the year, the month, the day, and the hour of your birth. For Confucius is most respectful of ancient rites. He favors absolute obedience to the three hundred ceremonial forms and to the three thousand rules of decorum. Personally, I have always believed that these rules were too exigent and too numerous; but he must be right, because he is manager of the public granaries while we live miserably in this lonely house. And besides, in time you will get used to the three thousand rules. Have you any objection to so suitable a marriage?"

For a long time Ki Kioo was silent.

"Shall I be able," she inquired at last, "to play at daybreak on my lute?"

"Of course," her father answered, shrugging his shoulders.

And so the marriage was settled.

To Ki Kioo were brought lilies and heliotrope, melons and pomegranates, which are the proper flowers and fruits for a young man to offer to his betrothed. And she flew hither and thither

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on girlish wings; she preened herself, forming a thousand childish projects, and the days sped by until the seventh moon of the year of the Hare, at which time the marriage was to be celebrated.

Ki Kioo learned from the mouth of her betrothed the number of sacred books and the principal truths which they contain. In the Shoo King, for example, there are fifty chapters concerning the times of Yao, Shoon, and Yu. In the Shee King there are hundreds of hymns and thousands of odes. In the Yee King are all the methods of prognostication practiced by the ancient magicians. And in the Lee Kee are the precious rites, the inestimable rules of ceremony. But to these even more must be added. It was necessary to multiply and codify the ceremonies. It was necessary to make a compilation of all these books, strike out all that did not conform to good sense, add new traditions to the old, edit an enormous code made up of all the laws and adjurations, erect a monumental text of history and ethics.

Ki Kioo was very much afraid when she learned that all this was to be the task of Confucius. Smilingly she approved everything that

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he said, being filled with admiration. But presently she had a headache. She imagined that the sacred books had been placed upon her chest to stifle her; and when she played the lute her fingers had lost their lightness and her music was less beautiful, as if the spirit that used to be her inspiration had now deserted her.

"What is that noise in the street?" asked Confucius in the middle of the wedding breakfast.

Chang, the guardian of the house, came up laughing and said:

"It is Mong Pi, the cripple, who is so delighted with your marriage that he is performing a thousand amazing tricks which amuse the children."

"Bring him into the courtyard," answered Confucius, "and give him food and drink."

So much was being said about happiness that Ki Kioo wondered why she herself was not really happy. She was seized by a sort of panic, a desire to go far away, a feeling like that of a bird when it realizes that it has been taken in the net.

She was reproaching herself for feeling in this way when, under the cypress in the garden,

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Confucius said to her with solemn tenderness: "There are three joys of marriage which we shall presently experience: The sweetness of mutual affection"—here he gently pressed her hand—"the nobleness of family feeling"—here he pointed upward to heaven—"and the beauty of the conjugal act." Modestly he lowered his eyes.

How many splendid qualities were reflected in his countenance! Natural goodness, parental affection, respect of family, a wish to perpetuate his race, and a longing to teach goodness to other men. Ki Kioo was aware of all this and thought that her heart must be very, very wicked to harbor a desire for flight. Ah, that solitude before the dawn! The old garden overrun with weeds, and dewdrops glistening on the trees! Never again would she know these things. There awaited her a life of conduct above reproach. Nevertheless, the first hour of night was very difficult. Relief, however, came to her.

She had lain down upon the bed, loosened her gown, and attempted to smile with fitting docility. Outdoors she could hear shouting and laughter and she could see the lantern-light that trickled through the chinks in the wall.

Then Confucius, having undressed, made a

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suitable genuflexion beside the bed in which they were to lie together.

But Ki Kioo, whose eyes were closed, heard from somewhere the familiar sound of a lute, a friendly sound which brought her a little solace—all that she had with which to combat the conquering gods called Social Order, Family Organization, unreasoning Poetic Fantasy. . . .

THE HIDDEN GIFT OF MUSIC

THAT year was a remarkable one for harvests. As manager of the public granaries, Confucius was requested to create a reserve supply to serve in case of famine.

Taking advantage of the powers which he had received from the King of Lu, he decided to establish this supply in some of the buildings of the lowest street in the town, whose inhabitants would receive an indemnity. Thus he would purify, by the wholesome presence of grain, this quarter which was a disgrace to Tsioo.

The house formerly occupied by Lu and where Mong Pi was now living alone, was one of those which were to be thus transformed. When Mong Pi heard what was about to be done, he declared that rather than abandon his tumble-down old shanty he would be buried beneath the grain, and he threw on the ground the silver taels sent to him by the manager of the public granaries.

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"I am faced with conflicting duties," said Confucius when he was told of the incident.

He thought about it for some time.

"The good of the State must be considered before the good of an individual, no matter how worthy the latter's motives may be, because the State is the union of all individuals, and hence it represents the worthy motives of all the people."

And he told them to cast out Mong Pi, but to be careful that he did not let himself be buried under the heaps of grain, as he intended.

Henceforth Mong Pi slept out of doors. From his house he had carried away only a crudely whittled chunk of wood which was supposed to represent Lu, his mother. And he continued to commit many acts of folly, to sing and laugh upon the slightest provocation, and sometimes to weep, when he was beside the mound underneath the juniper-trees on the hillside.

Meanwhile Confucius increased in wisdom, virtue, and influence. His renown was soon so great that, in spite of his youth, many people came from afar to hear him speak, and to study history and ethics under his direction. Presently he was obliged to open a school for the benefit of his disciples.

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One day, he noticed that he had acquired a strange love of music. How it had been acquired he could not imagine. But he was positive that harmonious sounds increased within him his love of virtue. He went to study the lute with a great musician named Siang, quickly becoming an accomplished player. Always he was careful to distinguish between proper music and that which was improper, that which inspired man to noble deeds, and that which roused his bestial instincts.

Because of this distinction, he was forced to forbid Ki Kioo, his bride, to rise at dawn to play upon her lute in the garden. In the first place, it did not seem suitable to make music when everyone else was still asleep, and then too, there was in the tunes she played a certain languor, something with dangerous golden wings, which was unbecoming to the wife of a manager of public granaries.

He bought for Ki Kioo, so that she might play at a reasonable hour the music he specified, a collection of new lutes, which he had sent from the capital of the Kingdom of Lu.

But Ki Kioo could play only at daybreak and upon her old-time lute, the one she had played as a girl in the weedy garden. She made no remonstrance, however, because—how can

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a bird in a cage remonstrate? And besides, Confucius' kindness enveloped her like a white, silken mesh. Looking up at him, she said to herself:

"He has honored me. I owe everything to him. And I have been able to give him nothing which he really loves—neither sacred texts, religious hymns, nor records of ancient emperors! How can I ever atone?"

She could not know that she had presented him with the most precious of gifts. It was with the harmonies of her lute that she had insinuated into Confucius' heart, by means of subtle, invisible vibrations, the love of music which he now so ardently professed. He himself was ignorant of her gift; for men can never understand that the best of their soul, the germ of their wisdom and of their art, have been given them by ignorant women.

One day, when Confucius was walking in the country with Tsou Lu and Tsou Kong, two rich young men who had come to Tsioo to profit by his teachings, he saw Mong Pi coming toward them along the road.

Mong Pi was limping more than usual and

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seemed very tired. Kneeling before Confucius, he said:

"Since you have taken everything from me, take also my soul and remold it. Teach me your wisdom. I want to be your disciple."

"I should like nothing better than to teach and reform you," Confucius replied. "But why do you say that I have taken everything from you?"

Mong Pi was silent.

Confucius reflected. Then he turned to Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong.

"Perhaps he is right. The substance of wisdom is made out of the substance of folly."

TAO

A LIGHT breeze, a mere breath, moved close to the face of Lâu-tsze. He got up and followed an invisible presence which preceded him.

The Palace of Earth-Spirits was deserted, and gathering dusk lay heavy on the trees in the garden. Lâu-tsze went straight to the great block of black marble which supported the Palace on the side of the rising sun. At his feet was an ancient flagstone, and it occurred to him that it was beneath this stone that he must search.

He seized a spade and began to dig. Presently he perceived that the stone was tilting. It revealed a hollow space in which there rested a bronze coffer corroded by time. On the coffer was carved the name of Fo Hi.

Lâu-tsze, trembling with emotion, reverently raised the coffer in his arms and carried it into the Palace. Inside, no doubt, Fo Hi had placed secrets concerning the human soul before birth

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and after death. The man who had substituted writing for the language of knots tied in a bit of string, and who had tamed the six kinds of domestic animals, was about to communicate to him that supreme knowledge from which all other knowledge flows. Lâu-tsze opened the coffer and looked.

Immaculate as Truth, and cloudy as the mystery by which Truth is surrounded, there was in the bronze coffer soiled with earth a block of azure jade. In its soft beauty were visible benevolence and the other excellent qualities of the yellow race. In its polish shone the intelligence of the first emperors; its solidity resembled their strength of character; its uniform coloring represented their consistency. And this block of jade was gleaming, with its blue purity exquisitely veiled, like the divine spirit of man within its shell of clay. One word, one single word, was carved upon the jade.

In vain Lâu-tsze turned it over and over, admiring the fluid splendor of this unadulterated stone produced by the mineral kingdom as a drop of its own soul, in the hope of finding a complementary inscription. There was only the single word which is sufficient unto itself, the word of

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the beginning and of the end, and this word was: *Tao*.

Lão-tsze placed the block of jade on the ground and knelt down before it. The sun as it sank, cast its dying glow in all directions.

"O nameless Thing," said he, "thou who art without form, thou who art not measured by the passage of time, thou who art unlimited in space and whom no words describe, I am thou, I am the child of thy breath. Though I am measured by time, limited in space, and definable by words, yet I aspire ultimately to disappear within the breath of thy being.

"I was already born before the appearance of any corporal shape. I had begun before the beginning. I was present at the development of the primeval mass. I stood erect on the surface of the great primordial ocean, and I soared through the mist of the first empty shadows. I shall go out into space through the same mysterious gate by which I entered.

"I have been projected into innumerable lives. I have been molded in thousands of different forms. But at last I have seen the light. I perceive that original perfection to which I must aspire; and I shall sleep at last in the universal substance of which I am made."

Book Three

CONFUCIUS AND

LÂO-TSZE





THE FIRST CARP

THE prosperous manager of the public granaries was installed in the capital of the Kingdom of Lu, and it was there that Ki Kioo gave birth to a child. This child was born with an extremely feeble body, Nature wishing to show in this way the lifelong insignificance of a great man's son.

Confucius rejoiced, for it is fitting that one should, through the pious path of marriage, bring little children into the world. Thus are races perpetuated, and there is no more commendable act than that of increasing the number of living creatures under the sun.

And there happened simultaneously with this birth a highly important incident which filled Confucius' heart with a joy almost as great as that of the birth itself. The King of Lu, in order to demonstrate his approval of the fatherhood of his excellent grain-manager, sent him as a present a beautiful carp out of the river.

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Confucius was talking with Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong in the courtyard of his house when a messenger arrived with the carp. First Confucius performed a genuflexion before the fish, and then his face lighted up with a gladness restrained but genuine.

Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong thought at first that he was making sport of the pettiness of his present. They themselves considered it an insult, and were ready to show their indignation at the sovereign's ingratitude. But they checked themselves in time. Their master's joy was sincere. For the more powerful men are, the more trifling their gifts may rightfully be. Those who venerate power must be satisfied with the crumbs it scatters, inasmuch as these crumbs fall from a lofty place.

Confucius sent Chang to invite more guests to the feast. Was it not his duty to let as many of his friends as possible enjoy this food which had been given by the King? And to celebrate the favor he had received, he called his son *Pe Yu*, that is to say, the first fish, the carp being the first of fish, as it had been sent as a present from the King.

And on this day of satisfaction there occurred

together with the feast of the carp a deeply significant event that plunged Confucius into a sadness nearly as great as the joy which he had just experienced.

Either because she did not realize the honor conferred upon her, or because she did not care for fish, Ki Kioo refused, in spite of her husband's command, to eat any of the carp. Thus at times do women display their savage and mutinous instincts, by failing to honor that which should be honored.

Confucius knew already that his wife, Ki Kioo, had not the slightest reverence for hierarchies; now came this revelation of her own inferiority.

The disciple Mong Pi had not been invited to this meal, because he had never learned to eat properly.

AN EXAMPLE OF FILIAL PIETY

LIKE the tradition of filial piety in the Empire, the health of Confucius' mother had been declining. She died in the year Ko See Yu; and Confucius, who had loved her tenderly, wept much. But the fate of great men is hard, for even in their grief they must furnish a good example to others.

The antique ceremonial decreed that a son, upon the death of his father or of his mother, should give up his occupation and remain shut up in his house for three years, devoting himself exclusively to mourning. This somewhat strict tradition, which had often brought about the ruin of pious families, was no longer observed except in rare instances.

When his mother had been buried according to the rites, with her feet toward the south and her head toward the north, protected from carnivorous animals by a varnished casket four inches thick, Confucius announced that it was

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his intention to observe the ancient ceremonial; and so, resigning his position, he entered his house to abide for three years with the spirit of his mother.

The pious rites prescribed that his wife and son should do likewise, and accordingly Ki Kioo had to be shut up with the spirit of her mother-in-law.

Their house stood on the outskirts of a suburb, and was large enough for peaceful meditation, being at the same time sufficiently small for utter boredom. The flagstones of the inner courtyard were blackened and worn by the feet of the early inhabitants of Lu; and after Ki Kioo had counted them again and again she had not the courage to continue. The garden straggled near the ramparts of the town; and these ramparts, built of massive blocks of stone, cast over the garden such a heavy shadow that, when Ki Kioo passed through it, she felt as if her heart also were being invaded by a black shadow.

Confucius' mother had been a devout sheep, one of those woolen-muffled creatures who shuffle along with their eyes fixed on the ground, never observing the birds that fly about them. She had hardly ever seen Ki Kioo; but the young

woman's bird-like flights had displeased her, and she had showed her displeasure by persistently looking at the ground in silence, entirely regardless of her existence.

When Ki Kioo became a prisoner in this house and in its garden overshadowed by the ramparts, she found herself repeatedly addressed by the woman who, when she was alive, had scarcely ever spoken to her.

"Wicked daughter-in-law, you do not mourn my death!"

Dull syllables, dropping from the only mulberry-tree in the garden, which the shadow of the rampart could not reach, and beneath which Ki Kioo liked to sit.

"Wicked mother, your son does not wholly occupy your heart!"

A whispered reproach issuing from the wooden balcony from which sometimes she would watch the water-carrier passing, or the muleteer driving a rice-laden donkey up the street.

"Wicked wife, you are unable to console your husband!"

This last remark rose from the flagstones in the court. An inner chamber contained the ancestral altar, over which a red lamp cast a dim

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glow in the twilight. Before the altar Ki Kioo saw Confucius kneeling in his yellow robe, lost in prayer and meditation. His back appeared enormous, strong enough to support the weight of the house and even of the whole town with all its ramparts.

No, she could not console her husband. The ancestral altar was hideous under its single red lamp, which glowered at her like an angry eye. It was not a question of consoling, of being a good mother, a dutiful daughter-in-law. It was a question of conquering fear, of ceasing to live with a talking corpse, of escaping from the frozen temple, of going somewhere where her heart would at least be warm.

That evening Ki Kioo started to run in all directions, to flee round the house and through the garden to get away from her invisible accuser and to reach the country of those who live. Her wings caught in the doorway; and she found herself in the arms of the guardian Chang, scrutinized by the sad eye of Confucius.

"Mutual love carries responsibilities," he told her. "But in the end, obedience to the laws brings us the purest joy. We must get used to this obedience."

And the next day she found in her room a copy of the Yee King, the most abstract of the canonical books, left by her affectionate husband for her amusement.

Ki Kioo did try to get used to things. But one can never get used to fear. She could no longer sit down under the mulberry-tree; she could no longer walk in the courtyard or watch the water-carrier from her balcony, because of the dull voice, the hidden presence, the invisible companion who walked with her about the house.

She could not get used to it, but she obeyed. Her blood no longer flowed with the same ardor; her cheeks grew pale, and her eyes became hollow. The beauty of her body left her as an angel leaves one who fails to provide the azure nourishment it needs.

Bent over his books, Confucius thought of Ki Kioo and said:

"She is not intelligent; but she practices obedience, which is the second virtue."

THE BROKEN LUTE

NOW one morning before sunrise Ki Kioo, who was not asleep, decided to struggle against despair. And she went to find her weapon, the old lute that she had played long ago in the weedy garden.

She went down the steps on tiptoe into the silent court, went without humbleness directly in front of the ancestral altar, and passed out into the misty garden, where she began to play.

She played some happy tunes, tunes of long ago, dance-tunes, and snatches of the songs of vagabonds. She knew that the ghost was hovering round her with its reproaches and maledictions; so she defended herself with music, ensheathing herself in a dance-dream of youth which was like ethereal armor.

"Wicked daughter-in-law! Wicked mother! Wicked wife!"

Yes, she was all these things. She was well aware of it; and it was because she felt herself so

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wicked that she was growing thinner every day, while the delicious suavity of her expression had disappeared. But once and for all she was tasting the bright intoxication of musical billows dancing in the half-light before the dawn.

A rapid step resounded in the garden. The music stopped. Confucius was there.

He felt that it was his duty to check this frivolity, to guide this weak soul into the path of rectitude. He was genuinely sad to realize that Ki Kioo had not taken his commands to heart, that she was lacking even in obedience, the only virtue for which he had given her credit.

"And so this is the way you have chosen to honor my dead mother's spirit!" he said. "You do not hesitate to violate the dignity of mourning nor to counteract, by this scandal in the night, the good example I was trying to provide! Did you not love my mother?"

Ki Kioo looked at Confucius as tremulously as if she had been in the presence of the judge who weighs men's actions in the balance.

"No," she murmured gently.

The eyes of Confucius plunged with horror into Ki Kioo's innocent eyes as if he were endeavoring to fathom the abyss of Chaos in the

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distant days when evil was oozing out of the disordered masses. Then he seized the lute, which had been the emblem of her revolt, of her incomprehensible behavior, of crafty art combating virtue, and broke all its strings with a single resounding blow. Finally he cast the battered instrument on the ground.

Ki Kioo uttered a little cry like that of a dying bird, crossing her hands upon her wasted breast. Confucius, who was ashamed of his unphilosophical impulsiveness, rapidly strode away.

Gradually the garden was illuminated with a faint light like the cloudy consciousness of a sparrow. The ramparts began to cast their heavy shade. And from a distance came the tinkle of a temple-bell.

Just at that moment there appeared above the top of the garden-wall the head of the wanderer Mong Pi. It was so long since he had seen Ki Kioo. He knew that she was shut up in the house of mourning. He wanted to glimpse for a second the pretty face from which had emanated, like vapor from a blue lake, his first and only dream of love.

He saw her pinched features, her frail body, and the broken lute. He beheld in this joyless

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garden the mere thin phantom of his beautiful dream. Confucius' back was disappearing behind a corner of the house—his back that was as rounded as politeness, and as ponderous as virtue.

Mong Pi dropped back into the street. At the bottom of the wall he squatted, weeping for a long time.

What a terrible human law! He who covets wisdom thereby loses beauty. Why not covet folly instead?

THE THREE WISE MEN OF THE EARTH

IN those days China, the color of alabaster in the setting sun, was passing through a period of decline. Buildings were permitted to decay, the government was disorganized, the Empire was decimated. By a singular coincidence, all the rulers either were born incompetent or had some blemish that ate into their minds. The Emperor King Wang was frivolous, taking interest only in insects and in the plumage of birds. The King of Tsi was cruel, and put his subjects to death for his own pleasure. The King of Lu loved only art.

And beyond the frontier of China, across the western desert, in the hot land of emerald-colored India, where the Ganges flows through jungles and virgin forests, the people were unhappy because of the captivity of their souls. The priests, threatening them with the wrath of the gods, had divided them into rigid castes; the

sky of India hung low upon them, nor did even death deliver them, because of the merciless law of reincarnation.

Across the Indus River and across the river Oxus on the shores of Greece which is the color of marble in the rising sun, in all the lands bathed by the Sapphire Sea with its Phœnician barques and Carthaginian triremes, the men with bright eyes and curly beards were anxiously awaiting the new word which was to make them better able to reason in the light of explanation.

Lão-tsze was born in China. The Prince Siddhartha, who was called Buddha, was born at Kapilavastu in the land of the Sakiya. And it was from the Island of Samos that Pythagoras journeyed forth from temple to temple and from town to town. Thanks to him, fine stones were chiseled into statues; timid speculations became systems of philosophy; sparks of intelligence were kindled into flame beneath the porticoes of agoras from Memphis to Corinth, and from Syracuse to Athens.

These three wise men spoke at the same time. When the intellectual treasure of mankind is in danger, then there come those who are to be its saviors. Perhaps there was a secret peril, and

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this was why the lords of the universe sent these three messengers of love and wisdom.

But they did not know one another. Each divined instinctively the presence of the others. They spoke to one another only in the solitude of their meditations. Each was obliged to perform his task alone, passing through the slow development of childhood, undergoing the hardship and labor of youth, feeling ingratitude and hatred in the prime of life, and crossing the threshold of death without achieving the reward of his endeavors.

It is the same law for all, for the great as well as for the insignificant.

THE DISCIPLE SIU KIA

IN the Palace of Earth-Spirits Lâu-tsze lived alone with a servant who was called Siu Kia. More and more he was left to himself, because, either through flattery or by natural inclination, the whole court had taken to imitating the Emperor in his frivolity. The scholars came more and more rarely to talk with Lâu-tsze. Nobody wished to read his books; and the ancient Palace seemed to be abandoned.

Siu Kia, the servitor, was a simple and silent man. Lâu-tsze did not instruct him. But even when he does not speak, the wise man, through his very presence, gives a secret instruction which has need of neither sound nor symbols. Siu Kia, guardian of books, by frequenting Lâu-tsze in his hours of study became a disciple rather than a slave.

Little by little, he ceased to mend his master's robe, to sweep his room, and to mend the mat on which he slept. The garden around the Palace

was neglected because Siu Kia was lost in meditation. He was no longer capable of any task but that of crossing the river to get their daily rice, and of having it cooked. Lâu-tsze had formed the habit of drawing his own water from the well in order not to interrupt the reflections of his servant.

Dust accumulated in the Palace. Night-birds filled the halls with the beating of their wings and built their nests on the jasper columns. Grasses sprang up between the flagstones on the threshold, obstructing the door. A cypress-tree fell across the long avenue as if to block the way to visitors. The garden was clogged with a dense growth of vegetation as if Nature had wished to provide the wise man and his disciple with more perfect solitude.

And, seated on the crumbling stones or under the tangled bamboo-trees, the keeper of the archives benevolently explained to his servitor the mystery of Tao; and his own ideas became clearer through the magic of self-expression. Siu Kia knew that Tao is supreme reason, primordial essence, the pathway of the soul; and he knew that Te, the second aspect of Tao, is supreme virtue, ideal perfection, moving love,

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which permits man's spirit to be absorbed by the divine essence of Tao.

The more Siu Kia studied Truth, the more motionless he became; for according to the teachings of his master, it is only through meditation that one may arrive at an understanding of Tao. So that Lâu-tsze, who did not wish to hinder his disciple's development, used to go at dawn to fetch rice from across the bridge, had it cooked for their meals, and sometimes mended Siu Kia's robe when it was torn. One day Lâu-tsze said to Siu Kia:

"It is written in the Books that a long time ago, Emperor Moo Wang made a journey to the Mountain of Kwen Lun, which is in the west. There he made the acquaintance of her whom he called the daughter of the western king; and on the Lake of Yao they sailed together, singing for their own amusement. Moo Wang had brought with him twelve philosophers who were familiar with the magic arts and the hidden science. I have always believed that in the western lands beyond Kwen Lun, there is a country inhabited by men of perfect wisdom, who have inherited the lost secrets of the ancient races, who are no longer subject to the trans-

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formation of death, and who endeavor to direct mankind along the path of reason.

"Now last night I had a dream. I saw sitting under a fig-tree a man of radiant countenance, who appeared to be meditating. I discovered in his gaze an expression which I have often observed in my own eyes, when I have studied my reflection in a pool. The landscape which surrounded the fig-tree and the radiant man made me believe through its richness that it lies in the country beyond the mountains of the west. I am too old to go so far. But perhaps you, who are young and strong, will go and talk with this marvelous man who, I am certain, is one of the mighty sages of the earth."

Lão-tsze had hardly pronounced these words before Siu Kia was on his feet.

"O Master, I shall depart immediately. I shall go to Mount Kwen Lun and to the mountains of the west. I shall see the marvelous man and bring you back his words."

He took a staff and slung over his back a package of boiled rice. Then he hesitated.

"Who will take care of you? Who will prepare your food while I am away?"

Lão-tsze smiled.

"That hardly matters. My needs grow less each day. And besides, it is in search of divine nourishment that you depart."

Many days passed by. Every morning, after the manner of a very poor man, the keeper of the archives went to market to buy a few vegetables. No more letters came to him. He no longer saw anybody but the agent who came each month to bring his salary. He enjoyed perfect solitude. The Palace of Earth-Spirits had become for the inhabitants of Lo Yang as tiresome as science, as formidable as Truth.

Very often Lâu-tsze would interrupt his meditations to look anxiously down the long avenue of the uncultivated garden in the hope of seeing the approaching silhouette of his disciple, Siu Kia.

THE TRAVELS OF CONFUCIUS

THE fame of Confucius spread through the Empire by word of mouth in much the same way as the waters of the river Hoang Ho are carried among the fields by means of irrigation. When his period of mourning was over, Confucius said to Tsoo Lu and to Tsoo Kong:

"I cannot waste in the presence of my impious wife a wisdom that would benefit the whole Empire. Because my mind is as inaccessible to evil thoughts as is a piece of jade to the ravages of ants, princes have invited me to go and give them counsel. I must answer their appeal. Perhaps there is one who will choose me as his minister, so that I may inaugurate among his subjects a reign of virtue."

Then the travels of Confucius began. He traveled slowly, in a wagon covered with a strip of canvas and drawn by an ox; for wisdom is never in haste. Some of his disciples accompanied him, and it was Mong Pi who prepared the meals

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when they stopped in a meadow or beside a stream, and who set his shoulder to the cart when the going was difficult.

The King of Tsi received Confucius munificently, pretending to consult him on political matters of great importance. But he was a cruel man, who practiced evil and worshiped it. He was amazed to hear from Confucius that man is naturally good, and that a prince's duty is to develop goodness in himself and in his subjects. He would have liked to put the wise man and his disciples to death, but he dared not, and contented himself by sending them away.

The King of Way offered Confucius a palace to live in, and talked with him several times. But he was a timid man, so much afraid of innovations that he even mistrusted a reformer whose only innovation would have been to banish innovations and to restore the customs of the past. After a while, he assigned to Confucius a palace more sumptuous than the first, but situated in a mountainous region the accessibility of which was minimized by frequent rains. Confucius was obliged to depart in the autumn, in order to avoid being blockaded for several months.

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The King of Tsoo came to meet him on the bridge which marked the frontier of his realm. But he was a simple soul, who could not understand the sayings of Confucius. He was bashful in his presence, uncertain what to do. In order to avoid a recurrence of his painful feeling of inferiority, he refused to grant another interview, saying that he would do so only when he had been able to assimilate the substance of what Confucius had already said. He offered, however, to place a spacious palace at his disposal, and to furnish him daily with food in abundance.

On all sides young men appeared who wished to become disciples of the wise man and to listen to his discourse. Mandarins gave banquets in his honor, and when he passed through any village, all its inhabitants lined up to show him respect.

Confucius decided to visit the capital of the Empire, where a number of scholars were awaiting his arrival. Lia Yu, the son of one of the richest grandes in the Kingdom of Lu, who had just enrolled himself as a disciple, offered to pay the expenses of the journey. The King of Tsoo was delighted with this idea, and presented Confucius with a new carriage and a team of

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horses. He insisted, furthermore, upon sending along an armed escort, as the route was infested with brigands.

On the evening before their departure, Confucius conferred with Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong as to what should be done about Mong Pi. Mong Pi had been frequenting low places and often became intoxicated. He was utterly common and coarse. Apparently, he had not progressed in wisdom or virtue since he had been admitted to the circle of Confucius. In short, he was hardly more intelligent than the King of Tsoo. Many right-minded people were astonished that such a creature should follow in the footsteps of a mighty sage.

"He practices filial piety," Confucius hesitantly explained.

"But he practices it at variance with the rites," replied Tsoo Lu, "by making grimaces and contortions in front of a lump of wood stuck in the ground. In my opinion he does not practice filial piety, but dishonors it. Lia Yu, who is a young man of refinement, is disgusted with the coarse manners and filthy garments he affects. And if wisdom is always on the side of respectability, then I believe it would be an act of wisdom to banish Mong Pi from our midst."

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And thus it was decided. Confucius' departure made quite a stir. All the scholars in Tsoo were grouped in front of his door; speeches were made, flowers were strewn in his path. His disciples were greeted with cheers as they marched behind him.

In order to participate in this event, Mong Pi had cut a new staff upon which to lean, and which was garnished with a green branch covered with leaves. He imagined that this bit of decoration would compensate for his own sorry appearance and win him a humble place among his master's disciples.

But Tsoo Lu transmitted to him the orders of Confucius. The practice of virtue implied respect for conventions as well as inward sympathy with high ideals. So much the worse for Mong Pi, who had forgotten this and contented himself with a sprig of greenery at the end of his staff. He could not share their journey. He would have to remain among his equals.

They had left Tsoo some time ago; and the procession, composed of carriages and riders, had reached the top of a hill. Tsoo Lu, turning round, perceived the misshapen figure of Mong Pi running after them in the dust. He informed Confucius, who whipped up the horses with a zeal

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which was perhaps partly caused by his remorse.
The master murmured:

"Virtue often exacts from us unpleasant duties. Thus we may be obliged to part with a faithful dog we love, but that is cursed with abominable manners."

CONFUCIUS MEETS LÂO-TSZE

LÂO-TSZE was standing at the end of the avenue that led to the Palace of Earth-Spirits. As usual, he was awaiting his disciple, Siu Kia. He was surprised to see a crowd of people scrambling over the cypress which had fallen across the avenue. Chang Hoong, former secretary of state, was leading this crowd, and in the person about whom all the rest were gathered, Lâu-tsze, by means of the descriptions he had heard in the past, recognized Confucius. The wise man of solitude advanced toward the wise man of society.

"He is hardly better dressed than Mong Pi," Tsoo Kong said in a low voice.

But Confucius was already making the ritual genuflexions with which it is appropriate to honor a sage. He respected in Lâu-tsze the man whom the Emperor had graced with the title of Keeper of the Archives, a man who lived face to face with monuments of Chinese thought, a man

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who had acquired a wide renown through his knowledge of philosophy, and who stood like an ivory tower above the frivolous court of Lo Yang.

When he stood up he felt suddenly ashamed that he had put on a fine silk gown, and that he wore round his neck several insignia given him by kings. He made haste to take off secretly a sapphire ring which he always wore on his little finger.

Chang Hoong and the disciples withdrew, allowing the two great men to converse at their ease concerning the eternal truths. Confucius spoke. He explained his plans for winning man to righteousness, for reviving the ancient traditions, and for restoring the old pure doctrines of Yao and of Chun. Lâu-tsze listened to him in silence. And how could one bring about a reign of justice and moderation? Confucius believed that if the princes and their ministers were good and just, the world would quickly improve. Lâu-tsze was still silent.

"Am I not right," asked Confucius as though he feared that his interlocutor was not in full sympathy with his views, "am I not right, since I cherish goodness and should like to spread it,

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to seek the confidence of a prince in order to become his minister?"

Lão-tsze shook his head in disapproval.

But then, what ought one to do? Stand by with folded arms while the Empire dissolved, while morality crumbled away, and while virtue was ground into the dust? What, according to Lão-tsze, was the end and aim of life?

"The attainment of the path of perfection."

And by what means might this be done?

"Through immobility."

Confucius could hardly refrain from shrugging his shoulders. Through immobility, indeed! But what was the use of mere aimless thinking? Thought alone could not prevent evil from spreading, nor men from suffering.

"I have passed whole days without food and whole nights without food," he replied, "in order to meditate in absolute immobility; but it was futile business. Serious study is much to be preferred."

Lão-tsze smiled.

"Every intellect does not possess the subtlety which is necessary for meditation."

True enough! Confucius agreed; he himself was a practical man with his feet on the ground.

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But it is good for man, who must live here below, to have his feet on the ground. He had always advised his disciples not to worry about an incomprehensible heaven, but to concentrate upon the excellent earth where their feet might rest with certitude. Was he wrong? Lâu-tsze nodded to show that in his opinion, yes, Confucius was wrong.

Confucius felt a great wave of irritation rising within him. Nothing could make him believe that his own reasoning was not correct. The other man's philosophy, in spite of his positiveness, must be wrong. What would become of the world if all the wise men sat down to contemplate the inaccessible sky while neglecting to give useful information to the average man?

"What then, according to you, is the foundation of morality?" he asked with some impatience.

"There is no such thing as morality," answered Lâu-tsze, "since there is neither good nor evil."

"And what about family responsibilities?"

"They are objectionable."

"And the sacred rites of our ancestors?"

"They are useless."

"But what about respect for rulers? submis-

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sion to those in authority? the preservation of law and order?"

Lão-tsze's glance was charged with scorn. Confucius saw him looking at the insignia presented to him by the kings, and he lowered his head as if the gold and jade medallions had suddenly become too heavy. The interview was over. Confucius thought it would be well, upon retiring, to say some modest word.

"O Master," he demanded, "give me your advice about the work that I have undertaken."

"It is vain," answered Lão-tsze.

"Then I am wrong in wishing men to be ruled by justice?"

"It is not other men whom one must rule, but oneself."

"But I feel myself stirred by a passion for goodness."

"All passions are to be avoided, even that of goodness."

Confucius bowed to the ground. When he raised his head, Lão-tsze had already walked away. Confucius beheld only his meager back, covered by a gown with a star-shaped rent. On the way back the scramble over the fallen cypress seemed more difficult. It appeared to

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Confucius that he breathed more freely when he had left the uncultivated garden that surrounded the Palace of Earth-Spirits. All his disciples surrounded him, asking what impression he had received.

"The fish swims," he said, "and I understand its movement in the water. The bird flies, and I see how it beats the air with its wings. Animals run over the ground; I know that they push the soil with their paws. But if a legendary dragon, borne upon a magic cloud, rushes into a fabulous sky, I am unable to comprehend its nature. Lâo-tsze is like a dragon."

A PRAYER TO MEDIOCRITY

AND that evening, when the stars were beginning to twinkle, Confucius came out on the terrace of the pavilion where he lived in the garden of the former secretary, Chang Hoong. It was the first day of the full moon of springtime; and they were celebrating the Festival of the Lanterns in honor of the spirit which presides over celestial power.

The sound of chanting rose over the houses like a musical mist. Through the maze of narrow streets to his right, Confucius saw the temples with their lanterns of painted glass, looking like luminous hearts in which the blood of prayers was beating. To his left rose the massive walls surrounding the Palace of Delectable Thoughts. These walls were topped with lanterns and formed a ring of blazing stars. Songs of joy, mingled with the music of muffled drums and of muted kins, rose from the gardens of the Emperor. Before him on the river floated innumer-

able pretty boats with sails like the wings of butterflies. Processions passed in and out of the temples. And in the more populous quarters a joyous, moving crowd was surging, displaying the ten thousand expressions of human happiness when it is stripped of the mask of care.

Confucius did not feel at his ease. This capital was too vast, too noisy. He longed for the ordered calm of provincial towns. There were too many boats on the river, which was too wide. He had found Lâu-tsze too sublime a few hours previously. He was troubled to feel his silent presence behind the mass of dark cypresses which he perceived on the other bank. And the sky itself, illuminated by this brilliant moon, had never seemed to him so deep, so full of mystery, so infinite. Crossing his arms over his breast as if to clasp more tightly within him his unshakable conviction, he made the following prayer:

“O Mediocrity, dry bread of the soul, food which never fails, it is from you that I draw my sustenance. Wine without alcohol, which does not produce drunkenness but of which a man may drink his fill, it is your cup I quaff. Pedestrian poetry, verse that does not soar, song that does not stir the soul, I am your bard. O

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Mediocrity, you made me love the commonplace town where I was born, its modest hills, its temperate climate, its sky of pale, cool blue. You gave me that unbiased mind that permits me to grasp ideas, and that cold-heartedness which is my sure protection against emotional excess. You taught me that I must neither approve nor disapprove, neither embrace nor repulse; that I must avoid the ardor of desire equally with the dulness of despair. It is from you that I draw my right-mindedness and my love of law and order. You have removed from my steps the shadow of death, and you have suppressed death's mystery by teaching me never to think about it. Thanks to you, I have neglected the distant sky in favor of the earth upon which I live; and I have tasted the happiness which comes from having respected rules, cherished usages, and practiced virtue. O Mediocrity, I love you as I love the mediocre men who are my brothers!"

THE PATH OF PERFECTION

AT the same moment, standing beneath a cypress-tree that pierced the evening sky, Láo-tsze was saying:

"O Path of Perfection, which I have glimpsed within myself, carry me away in your invisible current, bear me off on your moistureless wave to the threshold without a door whereby one enters the colorless palace which contains ten thousand rainbows.

"Let me desire nothing more from this life than the water which I draw in my earthen pitcher, the rice which I boil in an iron pot, the air that I breathe, the sunlight in my eyes, and the night which covers me with its peace.

"O Path of Perfection, grant me the daily ecstasy whereby I enter into the Ineffable, by means of which I plunge into divine security.

"Preserve me from my animal instincts, from my human curiosity; and let me look with indifference upon the succession of lives and deaths

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and upon the ceaseless movements of man upon earth.

"May the baser part of my nature drop from me as a stone which falls into a lake.

"May my better nature enter the region which is neither above nor below, neither to the right nor to the left; the immeasurable realm where there is neither purity nor impurity, neither wisdom nor folly, neither truth nor falsehood, and where the sunlight mingles with the heart of man."

Book Four

CONFUCIUS AS
COUNSELLOR





PRINCE TING

THE town of Lu was built around a lake which was hemmed in by colored houses, in such a way that the lake had the appearance of a large mirror in a frame of lacquer and porcelain.

In the lake there was a lozenge-shaped island containing a tiny lake of its own. And it was in this island that Prince Ting had built the five palaces where he lived with his musicians in nostalgic solitude.

Prince Ting hardly ever saw the ministers to whom he confided his affairs of state. Nor did he see his musicians, who played behind screens or else at night in boats in the little lake, in the heart of the island. He saw only the form of Queen Wen Kiang, who had been very beautiful and who had died a century ago.

Queen Wen Kiang had been regent during the minority of her son; she had loved the arts as Prince Ting loved them; she had cared for love

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as no other human being had ever cared for it. There was no portrait of her which Prince Ting could contemplate. And yet he lived with her picture.

He had caused the walls and the ceilings of the palace he inhabited to be covered entirely with copper mirrors, because it is out of the dim shadows of mirrors that the dead approach the living, when certain secret perfumes are burned and when certain magic music is played. Every evening at sunset he walked with the invisible Queen Wen Kiang, followed as she had done the path of cinnamon-trees along the shore of the island. On the way he would cut narcissi in the gardens, because he knew she had loved these flowers; and he would raise them to the height of her invisible face. Sometimes he would stop to observe her walk, and then he would run to catch up with her. When the sun had sunk and he returned to the Palace of Mirrors the Queen Wen Kiang passed through a door that led nowhere, always neglecting to take with her the bouquet of narcissus flowers.

Then Prince Ting began to suffer. He suffered from jealousy because of all the past loves of the Queen Wen Kiang. Tradition had ascribed

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to her numerous *liaisons*. He knew that she had loved vigorous warriors for their vigor, fastidious scholars for their fastidiousness, officials, carvers of ivory, polishers of jade, a dumb slave for his silence, a Tay Foo with a hideous face because he resembled a donkey, and the jester of a troupe of mountebanks because of his supple body. The faces of all these dead lovers came to grimace in the mirrors; they adopted attitudes of obscenity, they pursued ten thousand queens, who were naked and fainting, with open arms and moistened eyes. And sometimes, when the moon was full, flooding the palace with its pallid gold, there appeared in the mirrors a single Wen Kiang, pink and smiling, who emerged from the realm of fantasy, approached Prince Ting, showed him the flashing ivory of her teeth, touched him with her tawny skin, and disappeared when he tried to seize her, leaving beneath his fingers only the chill of polished copper.

When he was not thinking about the Queen, Prince Ting was interested only in different shades of lacquer or in the manufacture of colored porcelain. He loved to mix, upon an ebony tray, pig's gall with pulverized red clay. He polished varnished surfaces with tea-oil and

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with the ground burnt bones of a stag. He supervised at the kilns the baking of pottery into which he had infused chalk-dust and the ash of ferns, sprinkled with powdered gold. He used to say that it was his wish to find once more a certain shade which he had once seen in the water of a certain pond beneath a stormy sky; for this violet was of the same tint as the violet in the eyes of Queen Wen Kiang.

"It is better for the abilities of a monarch to be applied to the manufacture of porcelain than to the affairs of state," said Yong Lo, his minister.

Now, Yong Lo died; and much to the surprise of everyone, it was the philosopher Confucius whom Prince Ting summoned to replace him.

BROKEN MIRRORS

STANDING in the bow of the skiff that was taking him toward the island of the five royal palaces, Confucius knit his brows.

"If one wishes to uproot evil, one must uproot its cause," he murmured.

The desire for virtue had entered Prince Ting's heart, absorbing him completely. Henceforth he would obey his new minister, Confucius. And because that evening he wished to discuss with him the reforms to be accomplished, he invited him to walk a little way along the shore of the placid lake.

"We must not take this path," said Confucius gently. "The perfume of the narcissus is too penetrating, and causes one to dream. The shade of the cinnamon-trees is too restful, and leads to laziness. Kings should walk in places free from sensuous perfume and silent shade."

And all night long, by lantern-light, servants hacked down the narcissus flowers and tore up

the cinnamon-trees, so that in the morning nothing was left but melancholy stumps.

"In order to deliver the King's soul from servitude, I shall break one of the mirrors every day," said Confucius to his disciples. "Thus his illusion will disappear, and he will perceive the realities of life."

And every day, in the Palace of Mirrors, Prince Ting witnessed the shattering of one of the facets of his dream. Little by little Queen Wen Kiang's face appeared sadder and more tired, and her form became more vaporous. She seemed to approach with difficulty, having become timid and hesitant. When the last mirror was broken, Prince Ting saw in one of its fragments a Queen no bigger than his finger; and even she presently vanished in a kind of copper mist.

"How happy I am," he said sadly, "to see things as they are, at last!"

He still enjoyed the concerts given by his musicians, who played in the evening on the little lake among the five palaces, in a punt curtained with silk. Confucius ordered that every evening, behind the silken screens, one musician less should play. The concerts gradually diminished in volume. From the terrace in front of his

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palace, Prince Ting seemed to hear the beauty of the world expire.

The moon was shining, and spring had never been more wonderful than on the evening when there remained in the boat one single, solitary lute. Confucius had come to observe what effect would be produced upon the monarch by the last note of music.

And the accents of the lute were exceedingly strange, such as never had been heard before. The mandarins at court, the guards, and the boatmen hastened up and stood along the bank to listen. From the city sped additional boats, which drew close around the island-lozenge and floated motionless upon the lake, caught in the current of harmonious sound. The distant shores of Lu were black with crowds of people hungry for the crumbs of music coming to them on the breeze.

Among the five palaces in the middle of the little isle, the lone musician, who was invisible behind the screens of silk, sang of the fading youth of beautiful faces, of ambition too weak to press onward to the end, of loves to which one is unavoidably faithless.

Prince Ting was shaken with sobs, and Con-

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fucious could not understand why he himself had thoughts of which he had believed himself to be incapable. Then, suddenly he recognized the music. He remembered a cold dawn in his old garden, he recalled his wife Ki Kioo in the act of violating his command because she was devoid of filial piety, striving to vindicate her bird-like fantasy, her joy, her spirit of revolt. This was the tune Ki Kioo had played in the gray hour when wives ought still to be sleeping beside their husbands. The musician was already silent by the time Confucius decided to order him to stop.

"Have that musician brought before me at once!" he said to the supervisor of music.

But the man was not to be found. He had gone back to the shores of Lu.

"I hired him quite recently," said the supervisor. "He pays no attention to our rules, and yet there is something really magnificent in his style of playing."

"There can be no beauty where rules are not observed," Confucius reminded him severely.

The supervisor hung his head.

"Who is he?" Confucius demanded.

"He is a person called Mong Pi, crippled and very homely."

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Confucius reddened.

"Shall I search for him and have him beaten?"
asked the supervisor.

Confucius pondered.

"Find him, give him some money, and send
him out of the kingdom!"

THE REIGN OF VIRTUE

CONFUCIUS established innumerable rules, which he spread through the Kingdom of Lu in a bitter but invigorating stream. His pictured rewards of virtue served as a sort of sugar-coating for the rules; and the punishments he instituted caused them to be respected even by those who did not approve of their taste.

Confucius created a great bureau employing hundreds of clerks for the publication and enforcement of his rules. Everything was regulated. There were hours for work and hours for rest, hours for meals and hours for sleep. Each person, according to his means, was obliged to burn a certain quantity of incense on the altar of his ancestors. Everyone, according to his talent, was to devote himself to some form of art, but only during certain definitely prescribed hours.

Music after sunset was positively forbidden, because of its stimulating effect upon sensuous passions. For the same reason there was a heavy

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tax on spices and on certain herbs which were supposed to produce a similar result.

Out of sensuality, according to Confucius, came a host of evils: neglect of filial duties, lack of interest in the sacred books, sluggishness of intellect, and a moral laxity tending to corrupt the youth. Dancing was proscribed. Heads of families received lists of dangers to be guarded against in the rearing of children. Boys and girls were not allowed to walk together in the streets; and even married couples, when they went out, were ordered to leave between them a space wide enough for the passage of a cart. A committee of scientists decided upon the number of conjugal embraces which would reconcile the desires of human nature, the necessity of reproduction, and the fears of the legislators who believed sensual excess to be the most harmful of all excesses.

The Kingdom of Lu was reorganized from top to bottom. A complicated hierarchy held the reins; and of this hierarchy Confucius was the head: Confucius, who was accurate as justice, cold as morality, inexorable as boredom.

And under this régime the Kingdom of Lu enjoyed material prosperity. The more regular

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hours of work produced more abundant harvests; the more vigilant police furnished better security to travelers; poor people enjoyed a lower cost of living, since the speculations of unscrupulous merchants were curtailed. Honesty became prevalent. If an object was lost in the street, nobody dared to pick it up, through fear of being accused of theft. No kissing occurred except in matrimony; and even husbands and wives remained chaste for a long time after their marriage, having been accustomed to consider their desires as guilty.

Fineness of features disappeared, and men grew stout. Everyone fell back upon plentiful food, which was still permitted, as his only pleasure. Happiness diminished as prosperity and morality increased. Boredom, lack of initiative, and the absence of motivating force engendered stupidity. Virtue reigned in the Kingdom of Lu.

CONFUCIUS' DREAM

CONFUCIUS had a dream.

Beside his bed—it seemed—between two screens, which were the principal furniture of his room, stood Lâu-tsze. His expression was more benevolent than when Confucius had seen him on the threshold of the Palace of Earth-Spirits. He appeared not to rest upon the ground, but to be floating, so to speak, in the air. There was in his voice a note of pity.

“So you are minister!” He seemed to say. “But do you not know that a holy man should be unconscious of his merit, and that he should despise glory? Are you not ashamed to be a king’s minister, to supervise police, and to encourage war?”

Confucius answered that he was not ashamed.

“So much the worse. That is because your vision is not clear. You worry over other people’s passions; yet you fail to observe your own thirst for power. Your perception is not sufficiently

developed so that you can see both sides of things. Really, what a pity!"

Then Confucius saw that what he had thought to be the two screens in his chamber were actually immense wings, which were beating gently on the back of Lâu-tsze. And a little noise behind him proved that he too had wings, but infinitely smaller than those of Lâu-tsze—tiny wings that fluttered ridiculously.

But he had not time to be astonished. Lâu-tsze had made a sign, and now Confucius was flying behind him in the half-light which precedes the dawn. His first thought was that the wise man had chosen for this peculiar exercise the very hour at which Ki Kioo had loved to play her lute in the garden. Lâu-tsze's great wings made a fearsome noise, and behind him Confucius was getting out of breath.

"I am afraid of falling!" he murmured.

They had soared above the clouds; they were skimming over rocky peaks and lofty summits where there lay a livid snow.

"We are too high," Confucius complained.

"One is never too high," said Lâu-tsze. "The sky is boundless."

They left these summits below, reaching others

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even more jagged and desolate, stark as pure intelligence. "I am afraid of bruising myself on these needles of rock," whimpered Confucius.

"These are not rocks," Lâu-tsze replied, "but ideas. If only you have confidence we shall cross them easily."

And Confucius was amazed to see him pass through an enormous mountain as easily as if it had been made of mist.

"Come and join me!" cried Lâu-tsze.

"How can I?" Confucius demanded. "I am unable to dissolve matter."

"Climb, then."

Confucius saw that Lâu-tsze was flying high above him in the bluish atmosphere.

"It is impossible; my wings will hardly bear me."

"Be animated by the desire to rise, and your wings will grow large," Lâu-tsze said faintly, from afar.

"I feel them becoming smaller every moment." Looking over his shoulder Confucius saw that his wings had greatly diminished, so that only a few bedraggled feathers remained. The new-born day illuminated the heavens with all the colors of the rainbow.

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"Cease thinking of the earth, and you will find the Path of Perfection," said Lâo-tsze, who was now very far away indeed.

Confucius reacted with energy.

"Never! I shall not renounce the earth that I love," he shouted with all his might.

Then he fell. He fell with dizzy speed through purple clouds; he fell back to his familiar, tangible, protecting earth.

He awoke in his bed, without wings but bathed in perspiration. He turned over in anguish, but no excrescences raised his gown above the shoulder-blades. His back was perfectly flat. Heaving a deep sigh of relief, he got up to experience the joy of having his feet on the ground.

"Each man has his task," he reasoned. "I do not fly; I walk. And I should rather climb than soar. I am only the poor man who seems sublime to ordinary mortals. For me, that is enough."

BEAUTIFUL MIAO CHEN

FROM the Kingdom of Lu extended westward to the Kingdom of Tsi an ancient paved road dating from the reign of Woo Wang. A stone bridge across a river marked the frontier, and a numerous guard was posted there to prohibit the entrance, into the land of virtue, of all elements of disorder and immorality. These impure elements presented themselves at the bridge one evening in the picturesque and miserable form of a troupe of wandering actors.

The troupe was that of old Yan Yoo. His actors, who were the sons of slaves, instructed by him, were his property; but he had difficulty in providing them with food. Yen Ying, the Minister of the Kingdom of Tsi, was not a patron of the arts, and had recently notified him that he must leave the territory. Yan Yoo was ignorant of the reforms made by Confucius in the neighboring state; and he coveted the benefits that might result from the favor of Prince Ting.

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His troupe was extraordinary. It included a score of persons to whom he had taught the texts of age-old plays that were stored in his prodigious memory, as well as the barbarous Laï Y dances which are performed with banners and sabers to the sound of savage music, terminating in the frantic ecstasy of the dancers. Yan Yoo had the art of supporting his actors with amateur singers recruited from among the common folk of the countries he visited, so that his arrival was the signal for great popular rejoicing.

He threw himself at the feet of Taï Foo, guardian of the frontier, begging him to let them pass. But the guardian was relentless, for Confucius' orders were not to be disobeyed. As night had fallen, Yan Yoo's troupe camped on the other side of the bridge. On the following morning the sun disclosed astonishing events.

Just as a diamond is sometimes swept into a heap of rubbish, thus the marvelous young beauty, Miao Chen, had been swept into Yan Yoo's wandering troupe by the broom of the gods. She was sixteen years old, and her body was inhabited by the genius of the dance; her fingers were animated by an aptitude for playing

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on the lute; her red lips bore the impress of the gods of pleasing and harmonious words.

But just as a diamond in the rough is readily taken for a shiny pebble by those unskilled in judging stones, thus a beautiful young creature is thought vulgar by the vulgar people among whom she lives.

Yan Yoo's wandering troupe was roused that morning by cries of despair on the part of beautiful Miao Chen. As usual upon awakening, she had extended her right hand to caress the face of crippled Nioo, the troupe's buffoon, who slept beside her and to whom she accorded the favors of her childish love. The buffoon Nioo was old and ugly, but he made her laugh. Every morning she woke him up by tweaking his nose. But the nose she tweaked that morning was curiously cold. Nioo had died during the night without a sound of protest, no doubt because he did not wish to disturb the slumbers of his young companion.

The whole troupe poured out of the tents which they had pitched along the river and ran up to see why it was that Miao Chen had screamed. Lamentations rose to heaven. In despair Miao Chen rent her ragged gown, and her

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slender body appeared like a trembling flower on which shone delicate pearls of dew.

According to the ancient custom, Yan Yoo, who had been the dead man's master and therefore represented his father, turned toward the rising sun and called Nioo by name, urging his wandering spirit to return to its bodily habitation. Actors and musicians repeated his cry together to give it additional force. And then a cry went up from the whole troupe. From the direction of the rising sun, over the bridge which led into the Kingdom of Lu, a man came limping. His face was almost as homely, his movements nearly as awkward, as those of the dead buffoon. It was Mong Pi, who had just been driven out of the kingdom.

For a few moments, in the uncertain light of morning, everyone thought that it was Nioo, resuscitated, who was coming toward them. Wails of grief gave way to shrieks of joy. Miao Chen stood still with arms outstretched and staring eyes. Then, light and naked, she rushed forth, ran to the top of the bridge where Mong Pi was standing, and embraced him ardently. Thus the happiest greetings are sometimes reserved for travelers who are a little mad.

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There were explanations on both sides. It transpired that Mong Pi was to learn the rôles of Nioo as quickly as possible, Yan Yoo having engaged him as an actor in his troupe. But the supernatural character of his arrival had won for him the love of Miao Chen. A grave for Nioo was dug immediately. Lamentations had ceased. They were suddenly resumed, however, for it was decreed that this day was to be crowned with excitement for the comedians.

Distant riders appeared on the road to Tsi. They surrounded a carriage drawn by four horses; and Yan Yoo knew, by their banners embroidered with silver and gold, that it was the Minister Yen Ying himself, in the act of inspecting the frontiers. What would he say when he saw this troupe which he had ordered to leave the territory of Tsi? But the guardian of Lu held the other side of the bridge with his soldiers, pitiless as the order he was executing.

Every forehead touched the ground. The carriage of the minister had stopped. The pikes of the cavaliers were rigid, while their banners flapped in the wind. This period of suspense was broken by Miao Chen, who raised her childish head through curiosity. A cry resounded. The

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minister leaped from his carriage and came to have a closer look at the young dancer.

"She has violet eyes!" he shouted. "The violet eyes of the Queen, Wen Kiang!"

And as the twenty astonished heads turned in the minister's direction, the latter perceived Mong Pi and burst out laughing.

"And here is just the donkey's head I'm looking for!" He waved Yan Yoo to his feet.

"Henceforth you are the master of amusements for the King of Tsi. You shall follow me to Tsi Nan Foo with your comedians, but you must teach them a play that I shall give you, and use these two as heroes." He designated with his finger Mong Pi and the beautiful Miao Chen, whose innocent eyes, reflecting the rising sun, resembled two celestial violets.

THE CONFERENCE AT KIA KOO

WHEN the King of Tsi invited the King of Lu to a friendly conference, sending an ambassador and several riders dressed in blue as a sign of good faith, Confucius immediately suspected a trap, because he was skilled in the ways of men. As he respected courage among the other virtues, he decided to accompany his master to this friendly interview which was to take place at Kia Koo in the territory of Tsi. And as he respected prudence also, he ordered the minister of war to follow the royal carriage with a company of well-armed warriors.

The two sovereigns and their ministers were to discuss a subject upon which they had been decided for some time, namely: the possession of three towns in the Kingdom of Lu which the King of Tsi had seized with total disregard for justice. The meeting was to take place at sunset on account of the entertainment which was to follow, and to which the shades of night would lend additional charm.

In a meadow they had erected a daïs among the thickets of bamboo and cinnamon-trees; and here the two rulers were installed with their ministers. Confucius spoke first, with the decision of a man who is just and who is able to support his claims by force.

Night had fallen during the ceremony of welcome, the first polite formulæ, and the hypocritical protestations. Prince Ting, his eyes fixed on the evening sky, seemed not to be interested in the discussion. Although Confucius was speaking, the keenness of his mind enabled him to observe what was going on about him, including the event foreshadowed in the cunning faces of the King of Tsi and his minister, Yen Ying.

Lantern-bearers, coming out of the bamboo-thickets, surrounded the daïs on all sides. A triple row mounted the steps that led from the meadow to the daïs. Confucius noticed that their lanterns, instead of being blue for friendship, were red as if for violence, and that every porter was provided with a coat of mail and had a saber at his belt.

The minister Yen Ying had risen. He was about to cast aside his mask. But Confucius forestalled his action. Seizing the gong held by one of

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his servants, he beat upon it a succession of rapid blows. At this signal, the Marshal of Lu and his warriors rushed out of the neighboring wood where they had been waiting and ran across the meadow to the dais, surrounding it with a din of weapons. Some of the lanterns fell, a few sabers were drawn. There was a moment of confusion. The men of Lu and the men of Tsi awaited the order to spring to arms. Yen Ying advanced to give this order. Again Confucius forestalled him.

"Thinking that the time for the entertainment had come," said he, "I wanted these few members of my body-guard to witness the sport."

Yen Ying silently weighed the forces on either side, and yielded. He made a sign to Yan Yoo and his troupe to advance. Prince Ting, meanwhile, had not once interrupted his reverie.

The music which then resounded was unusual, being more voluptuous and wilder than that which is ordinarily heard. There were rolling drums that routed reason, and pipings of the flute which shocked the sense of modesty. But before Confucius had time to express his indignation at the effrontery of this music, the comedians had begun to act out their play.

Now this play concerned the loves of the

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Queen Wen Kiang and a ridiculous soldier who had a donkey's head. The beautiful Miao Chen was so delightful in the part of the Queen that when she appeared a shiver of anticipation ran through the audience, and all the lanterns trembled as if their bearers were intoxicated.

Confucius had sufficient presence of mind to spread his fan in front of Prince Ting's face, to prevent him from seeing those violet eyes, at the same time whispering to him concerning the three towns that were to be restored. Occupied as he was in this way, he only half listened to the comedy, and it was nearly over before he perceived how scandalous was its subject and how basely it appealed to the degenerate nature of Prince Ting.

He got up to interrupt. But his voice was lost in a gale of merriment. Mong Pi, with his donkey's head, so cleverly imitated the ridiculous warrior's joy when favored with the love of a divine creature, that the spectators sat down on the ground to laugh at their ease, while the riders from Lu fell from their horses, weak with mirth.

A sudden silence ensued, and Confucius checked his indignant words. Miao Chen was

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dancing. She danced nearly naked, with supple movements of her breast and thighs. Her face expressed the most perfect purity in contrast to her bodily quivering of desire. And as this abandonment increased in her, her eyes, like the water in a pool beneath a stormy sky, grew more intensely violet, and were fixed, as she had been commanded, on Prince Ting.

It was in vain. Confucius' fan waved back and forth, and during the whole dance the wise minister occupied his master's attention with subjects of the gravest nature.

Now, misdeeds must be followed by punishment, and the strong should not permit themselves to be insulted. The Marshal of Lu stood at Confucius' right hand ready to avenge the insult, and the horsemen's bucklers glinted ominously. Hardly had Confucius vented his wrath when the King of Tsi made voluble excuses, while the minister Yen Ying wrung his hands in despair. *They* were not responsible for all this. The play had been prepared without their knowledge. It was the vulgar actors who were to blame. Confucius would not consent to withdraw without immediate and tangible amends. Yen Ying offered to put to death at once the

whole company of actors on the very spot where the outrage had been committed. Confucius decided that such a merciless massacre was unnecessary. He desired only the death of the shameless dancing-girl. He knew that in this way he would be destroying evil in its most seductive and despicable form.

When they came to take her, the beautiful Miao Chen was laughing in the meadow, holding a donkey's head upon her knees; and occasionally she would rest her young face upon the shoulder of her friend, Mong Pi. She thought they had come to talk of money and congratulations.

A little later Confucius, having forced the King of Tsi to sign an agreement restoring the three towns, took leave of him with a thousand salutations. He hesitated as he got into his carriage, startled by a series of piercing cries.

"It is nothing," said Yen Ying. "Only the buffoon, Mong Pi, weeping for the woman he loved."

MONG PI'S THREE HEADS

THAT night Confucius had a dream.

Mong Pi—so it appeared—was standing beside his bed, and Confucius noticed with surprise that he had three different heads which he placed one after another on his shoulders.

The first head was that of beautiful Miao Chen. She was even more beautiful than when she had danced; she looked at him with her violet eyes; and Confucius observed that the amethyst shade of her pupils was exactly that rare light that rises from a pond in which dead plants are decaying, when it reflects a stormy sky. But he had no time to meditate upon the mystery which causes a beautiful shaft of light to rise from stagnant waters; for Miao Chen's head was replaced by that of a donkey. A donkey! Hateful stupidity, incongruity, and coarseness. But he had no time to consider the faithful friendliness that characterized the beast. For now Mong Pi's true face was close to his. And Mong Pi said to him:

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"I am the beauty of the courtesan, the folly of him who lives without the pale; I am laughter, I am your victim, Confucius. You will always persecute me, for you possess an impulse which makes you believe that your truth is the only truth, and that you must force others to adopt it. You are the personification of morality, and you are ready to make me suffer a thousand torments for my eternal salvation. I evade you very often, but you hold the upper hand, because you are the law and because you command the guardians of the gates and those who close, at night, the grilles between the different quarters. In the guise of a courtesan I shall be naked in spite of you, to trouble adolescence; as a musician I will play the tender tunes that produce forbidden dreams. I shall torment you always. O son of a sub-prefect, master of ceremonies, perfect magistrate, model of ministers! You will have on your side the sensible heads of families, the venerable matrons, the men of virtue, the whole of organized society. I shall continue to live among the poor, dividing my time between the prison and the highway; but in spite of your contempt for me, you will be chagrined at never being able to make me share your views. You may break the

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lute, cut off Miao Chen's head, and even snatch the heart from my breast; I shall not die, for I am eternal, and I shall be born again in the form of a lazy cricket or of a useless nightingale. Of us twain, O Sage, you doubtless consider yourself the better man. But I am superior to you in that, being your brother, I do not hold a grudge."

THE TWENTY-FOUR BEAUTIFUL GIRLS

CONFUCIUS ate but little, hardly slept at all, and worked prodigiously. It was in vain that his disciples urged him to rest. He only replied that the affairs of state required all his time. But at last he yielded ever so little. He agreed to remain at home for a single day. And it was on that day, while he slept, that there arrived the magnificent presents sent to the King of Lu by the King of Tsi.

They arrived at the North Gate on white horses, in the midst of a guard of eunuchs, and they were twenty-four beautiful girls with the milky skins of young almonds, hips as supple as palm-leaves, and lips as red and moist as carnal pleasure.

They came from Yang Choo, a town renowned throughout the Empire for the lascivious character of its inhabitants. It boasted schools of dancing and schools of music; and the voluptuous arts

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were taught to women from their tender infancy. Yen Ying had gone there himself, and had bought with the gold of Tsi the most beautiful creatures that he found, knowing that he could replenish the treasury of Tsi out of the abasement of the Kingdom of Lu.

The twenty-four beautiful girls crossed the city like a voluptuous dream; and Prince Ting, who was walking along the shore of the lozenge-shaped island, heard the music of their lutes and saw their white forms reclining in the punts that bore them over the lake. The girls stepped ashore in several different places at once; they ran laughing into the five palaces; they crowded among the garden walks; they assaulted the guardians of the gates; they climbed the marble stairs; they sent skyward a great wave of joy. And they all replied to Prince Ting, when he questioned them:

"We are the handmaidens of this marvelous, mysterious creature who is our queen."

Then they would point to the most beautiful one among them, who had the bearing of a young princess and wore a star-shaped amethyst on her forehead. She was dressed in a mauve tunic so transparent that he could observe the perfect form beneath. At length Prince Ting approached

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this glorious person and asked her name. Lifting the veil that hid her face, she transfixed him with her great violet eyes, and said modestly:

"I am Queen Wen Kiang, and I have returned to inhabit my island."

Prince Ting suddenly noticed that springtime had caused the cinnamon to bloom once more in the garden, and that narcissus was flourishing as if invigorated by some new joyous music in the air. He realized that he was in the middle of a wide, blue lake, and that he was walking beside the object of his long-lost dreams. On the way he picked for her a bouquet of narcissi; and as the Queen Wen Kiang seemed coyly provocative, he made haste to guide her toward his apartments, whither she followed him with no hesitation whatever. She was even in so much of a hurry that her behavior would hardly have seemed queenly, had Prince Ting not been blinded by desire.

Evening came. Lanterns twinkled everywhere like beacons of pleasure. A white stream of dancers frolicked through the garden and beside the lake, encircling the five palaces with a voluptuous crown. Soldiers had abandoned their weapons, and scholars their books. Skiffs were

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floating on the lake, and from them rose a crystal song that mounted to the stars. Every now and then a venerable mandarin, regaining the shore, would carry off to his house, like a morsel of chaste white jade, a beautiful, tender girl.

Communicated by the rhythm of the dance, this intoxication soon spread from the island over the entire city. Everyone was casting off the yoke of a too perfect morality. Windows gaped ajar. Through half-shut doors there slipped the stealthy forms of women eager for forbidden pleasure. It was possible to see worthy dignitaries, on their way to perform a ritual ceremony at the Pagoda of Imperial Ancestors, throw away their sticks of incense and their jars of milk, to rush pell-mell down to the ill-famed quarter of the town. On the threshold of the Tribunal of Rites, the grand-master of castigation stopped, sighed deeply, and lamented:

“Where are the lost years of my youth?”

In a single night was pulled down everything that Confucius had built up in the course of many years. For it is building upon sand to assume that morals are the foundations of society. That one is foolish who does not feel the hidden beauty of passion, the virtue of disorder, the cre-

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ative force of pleasure; who overlooks the fact that there is no more satisfying food to nourish the soul, and to uplift it, than love—the simple love of man and maid.

THE TRIUMPH OF JOY

A SKYLARK ironically beat his wings against the window, and Confucius at last awoke. The lark's insistence in pecking little holes through the mica of the window-pane made him feel that some change had occurred producing lack of respect for things which ought to be respected.

He dressed in haste. His body-guard and porters were not waiting before the door with his litter. In the street he was nearly knocked down by a drunken man. Then he rubbed his eyes, believing what he saw to be a dream. The dignified director of ritual ceremonies was strolling along just ahead of him, his arm around a slender creature shamelessly dressed, who was playfully tickling his nose with a peacock's feather.

"I have slept too long," thought Confucius. "All this must be a continuation of my dream." And as he reached the edge of the lake, his "dream" went on as follows:

Reclining in the bottom of a skiff on a heap of roses, was the minister of war. Obviously he was drunk. A painted paper lantern swung above his head, and he swayed with it, to and fro, laughing stupidly. A doll-faced woman sat on his knee, and every now and then he would fling a handful of roses at her hair.

This lantern, lighted in the daytime, together with the contrast between the marshal's massive build and his companion's insignificance, were for Confucius the material symbols of debauchery in its most hideous aspect. He could not restrain a gesture of imperious disapproval. The marshal replied to this gesture by pelting him with roses; and as the skiff was close to the bank one of the roses touched his forehead, pricking him with its tiny thorn. He perceived by means of this quite realistic thorn that what he had thought to be a dream was indeed actuality, and he feared that the Kingdom of Lu had been afflicted with some awful catastrophe. At the palace gate he had his presence announced to Prince Ting. But the monarch sent word that he could not receive him. In vain he waited. He was never again to have an audience with the King.

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Confucius' authority mysteriously died in every quarter at the same instant. The wheel of administration which he had oiled turned very slowly and finally stopped. The royal officials no longer came to receive his orders. He ceased to be obeyed. The support of his sovereign was lacking. A lute-player obtained without permission from Confucius the title of royal merry-maker plenipotentiary. The eunuch from Tsi who had brought the twenty-four beautiful girls, and who passed for a man of detestable habits, became governor of the five palaces on the island-lozenge, while the gardeners planted narcissus bulbs *ad libitum* as well as cinnamon-trees with long flowering branches.

Yan Yoo installed his troupe in the principal square of the town, directly opposite the Temple of Immaculate Perfection. He had lost his two most important artists, for Mong Pi had disappeared after the death of beautiful Miao Chen. But according to his customary method, he instructed the common people in the art of song, organizing immense choruses which filled the whole town with a mighty hymn of joy.

There was no longer any well-established order. Confucius felt that through a natural turn of

affairs he and his virtuous laws had been rejected and eliminated. He decided to leave the Kingdom of Lu, and one morning he called a meeting of those few disciples who had not yet changed their black robes for colored gowns. It was his intention to carry nothing away, leaving more humbly than he had arrived, for he was sincerely disinterested. But Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong were the only ones who came to the meeting. For a long time Confucius waited vainly in the morning melancholy of a deserted street. At last he started off with his two faithful companions.

Now a stray dog, a wretched yellow cur, began to trot along behind his horse, refusing to leave him. Confucius recognized the beast. It was a dog which had chosen the doorstep of his house for its refuge. He had seen it every day, and he had been obliged to use a stick to prevent it from entering, for he believed that the possession of a dog was contrary to domestic cleanliness.

He threatened it without result. The dog seemed to be attached to him irrevocably. It stopped, looked up at him with great sad eyes, and then, when Confucius started off again, it would faithfully trot along behind. At length

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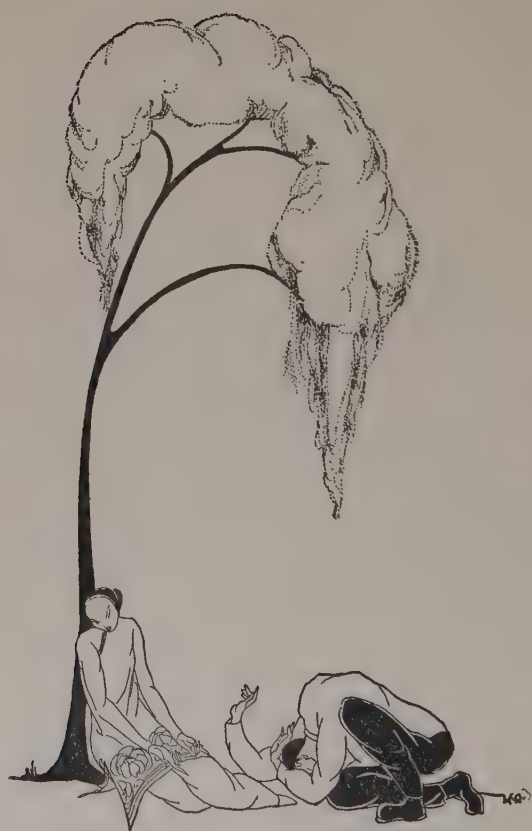
Confucius became resigned, saying to Tsoo Lu and Tsoo Kong:

“Not one of the inhabitants of Lu whom I have served so faithfully is here to follow me. And yet this dog, which I have repeatedly driven off my doorstep, seems to love me truly. How extraordinary it is!”

Book Five

THE OLD AGE OF
THE WISE MEN





SIU KIA COMES BACK

WHEN the disciple Siu Kia appeared on the threshold of the Palace of Earth-Spirits with his hair bound in a pug at the back of his head, after the Hindu fashion, Lâu-tsze held out his hands to him without displaying any particular surprise. This seeming indifference astonished his disciple. Lâu-tsze said to him:

"For some time now I have possessed a singular faculty which enables me, merely by closing my eyes, to visualize those with whom I am in close sympathy. I saw you, for example, on the high-ways. I spied the butt of your staff planted in the snow-fields on top of the Mountain of Lung; and even the desert sands whirling in the wind could not conceal you from me. But tell me what you have seen in the countries that lie beyond China."

"O Master," said Siu Kia, "many times has the moon waxed and waned above my head. I left the Empire through the Hang Kow Pass, I crossed regions thick with savage wolves, and I

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climbed enormous mountains round which eagles flew by hundreds, brushing my head with their wings. The wolves respected me because I was thin, and the eagles did not peck out my eyes, because the desire to learn gave to my pupils a certain heavenly quality that they feared. I crossed the sandy river where one dies if he encounters curious burning winds which are really jinn with robes of fire. I traversed the Kingdom of Chen Chen; and then, traveling toward the northwest, I reached the Kingdom of Wee, whose inhabitants are inhospitable, and the Kingdom of Yu Tian, whose inhabitants are mild and gentle, but few in number, and where there are square monasteries built of black stone at the summit of conical mountains. I continued always toward the west. The vegetation changed its aspect. The sky took on an indigo color which I had never seen before. I ascended the slopes of Tsoon Ling, encountering valleys so happy that one cannot look at them without weeping. There were trees which had the air of young girls amiably inclined, and rivers whose water was as pure as jade in the rising sun. At last, having crossed the river Aciravati, I arrived in the land of the Sakiyas. There I found everyone discussing

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the incomparable wisdom of a prince's son who was called Siddhartha."

"A prince's son!" interrupted Lâu-tsze. "I thought that only extremely poor men could achieve incomparable wisdom."

"That, O Master, is an error. This Siddhartha is the son of Suddhodana, a powerful sovereign who possesses war-chariots, slaves, and elephants, and who is dictator in the city of Kapilavastu. But all his father's property, his palace, and even his own wife, Siddhartha abandoned to live in the solitude of the forest among wild beasts."

"His wife!" interrupted Lâu-tsze once more. "I thought that only the chaste could attain incomparable wisdom."

"That, O Master, is an error. This Siddhartha even has a son, named Rahoula. Now Siddhartha was extremely compassionate toward men afflicted by sickness and death. The pity which he experienced for their ignorance and misery rent his heart. He sat down under the tree Peï-to and remained there until a revelation made known to him the secret of their deliverance. Then he rose and went among men to give them the fruit of his meditation and the Truth that he had discovered."

"Did you see him?" asked Lâu-tsze. "Can you tell me whether his countenance is majestic and whether a shaft of light leaps from his eyes as it did from those of the man I saw in my dream?"

"By no means, Master. Doubtless dreams transform and embellish substance. The man whose renown extends across the plains of the Ganges as well as into mountainous Tibet, and whom they call Buddha, resembles any ordinary man. His person is distinguished by no sublimity whatever—if I dared, O Master, I would say that he resembled you. I was able to approach him together with some monks from the country of Kee Cha, who had accompanied me on part of my journey. He was standing in the sunlight in front of a little rustic cabin under the vaulted branches of a tree, and he was in the act of pouring water out of a pitcher into an earthen drinking-cup. Beside him on a stone was a barley-cake which he must have prepared himself, and on which he was about to make his meal. Yes, this great sage was about to eat and drink as other men, as you yourself are obliged to do, and for some reason this filled me with emotion. When he saw us he set down his pitcher joyfully and greeted us with a friendly smile. He always smiles in this friendly way; and later, his teachings

seemed to me more beautiful because they were accompanied by cheerfulness."

"What were these teachings that seemed to you so beautiful?" Lâu-tsze demanded with impatience. "I trust that they were not so beautiful as to strike you dumb."

"By no means, Master; for these teachings were already familiar to me. They were the same that you have for some time been teaching to the little group of scholars who come to learn at your feet. The Truth which, thanks to you, is circulating through ancient China, is the same that Buddha spreads in India. Both of you teach that one must conquer desire within himself in order to escape the curse of eternal reincarnation and to enter into that blessed Perfection which is above good and evil. Both of you teach that one may succeed in this through simplicity of habits, absence of pride, solitary meditation, and the search for divinity within himself. And so I am very happy to have finished my journey and to resume a humble place at the feet of my master."

Lâu-tsze heaved a great sigh of relief; Truth does not have to be confirmed, but the mind of man is so lacking in certitude that even the greatest philosopher is glad to know that there is afar another philosopher who thinks as he does.

SIU KIA DEPARTS AGAIN

WHEN Siu Kia had finished the story of his travels, and when he had eaten and drunk, he sat down to meditate. But Lâu-tsze said to him:

"I have told you of the singular power which enables me to visualize distant men whose minds are in sympathy with my own. Now for some time I have repeatedly seen the vision of a marvelous man whose face expresses extraordinary curiosity and whose eyes gleam with a desire for explanation. He sits on the shore of a sapphire sea which is strewn with triangular sails; there is a white temple behind him, in front of which fly figures in the guise of mathematical birds. The landscape which surrounds this inquisitive man makes me believe, through the clarity of its atmosphere, the pallor of its marble, and the white skin of its women, that it lies in a country beyond the western mountains, in a region where no Chinese has ever been. I am too old to go so

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far, but perhaps you, who are young and strong and have become used to traveling, will go to seek this man whose mind is as clear as the sky above him and as that numerical science in which I suppose he is well versed."

Hardly had Lâu-tsze pronounced these words when Siu Kia seized his staff and stood erect.

"O Master, I will depart immediately. I must hurry, for the country of which you speak seems to be very far away. I have never heard of it, and perhaps the rest of my life will not afford me time enough to reach it."

"Possibly, on the way," suggested Lâu-tsze, "you may obtain information about the perfect sages, heirs of the lost secrets of ancient races, who live in the vicinity of Mount Kwen Lun, at the center of the earth, in a hidden citadel from which they direct the human race by the force of their intelligence. I do not know if they are visible. I do not know if, like the wise men of India, they smile benevolently, or if, like the mathematician of the western land, their glance is full of curiosity. If, however, you are permitted to see them, come back to me in haste; for it is in their midst that dwells the true light."

Siu Kia left the Palace of Earth-Spirits and

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moved off with great speed, for he had thousands and thousands of *changs* to cover, and his first journey had shown him the immensity of the earth.

"I am very old," Lâu-tsze had said when he accompanied him as far as the fallen cypress.

"We shall meet again soon!" Siu Kia had shouted back; but he was never to return.

MONG PI AND THE DOG

CONFUCIUS was traveling. He went from land to land in the hope of winning over the mind of some king so that he might purify his kingdom and subsequently the whole of China. But the kings paid no particular attention to his views. Old age had made him more rigorous than ever concerning the precepts of morality, and more insistent upon obligatory virtue. He had a deep sense of justice, but his conception of it was inevitably tiresome. He professed the sincerest love for his fellow men; but his love had a buckler of obligations and rules, which rendered it almost as odious as hate.

The King of Soong received Confucius with great honors. He was a heavy man who thought only of the pleasure to be derived from food. He sat at table finishing his meal while Confucius talked to him. The sage was speaking about the rules of moderation which make one's mind more free. The King fell asleep just in time to

avoid hearing an indirect reproach intended for himself. Confucius was shocked by his behavior and left the State of Soong.

The King of Cheng was a great hunter. He received Confucius in his garden. He held a bow in his hand, while his horse stood beside him, for he was about to go on a hunting expedition. Nothing daunted, Confucius explained at great length his method of government. Meanwhile, the King persistently watched the maneuvers of some wild geese that were circling overhead. He interrupted Confucius to ask the meaning of this unusual behavior on the part of the wild geese, which at this time of the year should have been flying northward. Confucius dryly answered that he was concerned not with the habits of geese, but with those of men. The King of Cheng sprang into his saddle and rode away at a gallop. Confucius took his departure.

Years passed. He acquired numerous disciples in the towns through which he passed. He spread his doctrine with unflagging perseverance. It was easily understood by all men of average intelligence, who received it with respect. But this was not enough for Confucius, who coveted the first place in the Empire, not through personal

ambition, but simply to vindicate his system of ethics. He grew somewhat bitter. At last he became discouraged. He railed against the degeneracy of the times. And he made up his mind to go home.

While crossing the mountain-range which is north of the Kingdom of Lu, his ox-drawn carriage and his little band of disciples mounted on donkeys were confronted by a gang of outlaws who made a business of holding travelers for ransom. But the outlaws recognized Confucius, whose fame was widespread and whose poverty was known to all. They demanded nothing from him nor from any member of his band. They even gave friendly information concerning a short cut which would enable the travelers to avoid a steep climb over the mountain.

At the moment when the two groups were about to separate, Confucius stifled a cry of amazement. Among the brigands he had recognized Mong Pi, more ugly and ragged than ever. Mong Pi, loaded down with a ridiculous weight of weapons, was staring at him with a mixture of joy and bravado. He burst out laughing and strode toward Confucius with outstretched arms, two massive sabers clanking at his belt.

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"I cannot let my brother pass without embracing him!" he cried.

Confucius shivered. He had never known fear, but such a scandal seemed to him much worse than death. His disciples were about to intervene. But Mong Pi, stooping at Confucius' feet, seized in his arms the wretched yellow dog which had become the wise man's faithful and well-loved companion, and caressed again and again, with brotherly affection, its untidy muzzle; then he set it once more on the ground. The yellow dog, instead of growling, yelped for joy; and when Confucius' carriage was about to disappear round a bend in the road it looked back yearningly at Mong Pi's silhouette, as if unwilling to depart. A little later Confucius turned to Tsoo Lu, who was beside him in the carriage, saying with a sigh:

"I am sorry to have seen Mong Pi among those highwaymen. That is where one is led by a disorderly and passionate life." After a period of silence he spoke again. "I do not understand why Mong Pi called that dog his brother, and why the dog did not bark when he took it in his arms. I suppose there is a certain similarity between

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the two wandering creatures; but it is particularly puzzling that they should both become attached to me and that I should have a weakness for them."

KI KIOO'S DEATH

ON THE TOP of the hill which dominates Tsioo, an old woman holding in her hand the skeleton of a stringless lute was running in the snow. She was Ki Kioo, the patient, the solitary wife of Confucius. Because of her lack of filial piety she had been relegated to Tsioo; and there she had grown old in that dim twilight of simple souls who have lost their ideal.

She moved quickly, for she knew that her life was short. Long ago Confucius had announced his return. She had hoped for it and feared it, too. Then she had ceased to believe it. But that evening there could be no more doubt. One of the disciples had come with news. Confucius was spending the night hardly a hundred *lis* from Tsioo and would arrive the following day.

For several years Ki Kioo's mind had been slightly clouded. Everything was muddled up in her head: the journeys of Confucius, the departure of her son, Pe Yu, the face of Chang, the old guardian; but she knew she must play once more

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on her dead lute in the uncultivated garden of her father's abandoned house. Through timidity and lack of will-power, she had kept putting off the realization of this dream, and now she was terrified lest she might not be able to find her way back to the pathways of her youth at the witching hour just before the dawn.

In the white, cold night she passed dreaming among the cedar-trees and jasmine, now and then stumbling over gravestones that projected above the snow along the road. At last in the bottom of the valley she saw a small dark spot. Since her father's death the old house had been uninhabited. The wind, taking possession of it, had demolished the roof. Rain and sun had done their work. The open windows were like sightless eyes, and a swinging door moaned perpetually.

Ki Kioo had no difficulty in entering the garden, since its wall, which had been considerably battered even in her childhood days, was now almost completely in ruins. But she recognized neither the silhouettes of the trees nor the contours of the bushes. The garden, like herself, had changed. With years had come to it the exuberant folly of nature.

With every step that Ki Kioo took in search of

the spot where she had been accustomed formerly to sit, a brier caught her gown as if some demon of the night had drawn her to him. She knew that the Tao Nius, witches with the minds of weasels, have the habit of haunting lonely houses and of lying in wait for passers-by, to drag them through secret passages into subterranean chambers where they drink their blood. She remembered that on winter nights a terrifying frog would issue from a neighboring pond and straddle the whole valley with his stilt-shaped legs. Only one who possessed the stone Shee Kan Tang to throw at him had the power of driving him back under water. She trembled lest she should discover suddenly before her the old man Fong Pee, who wears an ermine robe and has two rat-skin bags behind his back, and who is attached to the star Ki by a silken thread. His icy breath transfixes those he meets. And Ki Kioo held her arm before her face, because there is in each flurry of snow a fantastic heron who pecks out the eyes of human beings with its porphyry beak.

There came a distant howl, then another from a different direction, then many howls quite close at hand. Ki Kioo perceived between the

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crumbled stones in the wall the red eyes of a pack of wolves circling about her.

Then she began to strum on the imaginary strings of her old lute, because she fancied she saw on the snow the faint light of dawn; it was in reality merely a vague reflection of the moon. Passionately she played her soundless music until finally she had forgotten the Tao Nius, the dreadful frog, and the old man Fong Pee at the end of his silken thread. She played for a long time in the blinding snow until her fingers were stiff with cold and numb from contact with the invisible strings.

Perhaps this sort of music had influence on savage beasts. The red-eyed wolves sat motionless behind the stones, listening to what they could not hear. With unhurried majesty the sun began to cast a golden glint upon the snow. A light breeze sighed among the cedars. The wolves slunk stealthily away. A human shadow moved along the road.

And Mong Pi's lute with real strings began to vibrate in the frozen sunshine. Had he returned to find again his first dream of love? Had he heard her mystical music from afar? There he stood. He played until the sun had left its milky

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vapors, shedding violet blood across the snow-flaked sky. Then he glanced into the garden, which was glowing in the morning light, and saw leaning against the trunk of a tree a beautiful frozen corpse, white as a statue of crystal.

THE DEATH OF CONFUCIUS' DOG

CONFUCIUS celebrated the death of his wife Ki Kioo according to the most ancient and complicated rites. Then he installed himself at Tsioo. But hard times had come. One after the other he lost his disciples Tsoo Lu and Yan Yuan, whom he dearly loved; and this loss filled him with a great grief. He lost confidence in the practicability of his doctrine, which made him suffer even more. He had just finished his compilation of the canonical books and his edition of Spring and Autumn, but when his work was done he wondered whether it had been worth while.

On reaching home, he had found his house at Tsioo in such great disorder that he was ready to give up in despair. The garden especially saddened him because it had grown wild through lack of care. Camphor-trees, which formerly had been few in number, had multiplied with extraordinary rapidity; they pelted him with their whitish flowers, and at night Confucius was

shocked by the sparks which issued from their wood. There were also some rubber-plants whose leaves he found too thick, and in whose stalks the milk flowed too abundantly, bamboo-trees that split the paths like lances, and a sycamore which had sprung up so surprisingly that there was a kind of insolence in the enormous girth of its trunk.

"Thus," thought Confucius, "the disorderly aspect of nature inevitably triumphs the moment that men cease to struggle against it. Perhaps my work will be like this garden. Industrious I have classified and codified the four sacred books of the Chinese Empire. From the garden of ancient poetry I routed out the malignant weeds of enthusiasm and metaphysical reverie. I have cultivated the moral garden of the old masters of the time of Yao and Chun. But when I am dead no doubt exaggeration and lyrical excess will spring up everywhere so that one will no longer be able to find the straight paths which lead to rectitude."

Confucius had another sorrow. His dog died. He had become accustomed to this faithful companion who with the passage of years had turned blind and mangy. Bitterly he bewailed the death

of his dog, insisting that it should be honorably buried as the rites prescribed, with its feet extended toward the setting sun. He chose a sheltered nook in the garden where its body was deposited after being carefully wrapped by Chang in a thick straw matting, in order that the earth should not defile it.

The garden was separated from the road only by a lattice fence; and while, beside the grave, Chang was sewing up the mangy dog in the strip of matting, Mong Pi approached and stopped to look. Confucius did not immediately perceive Mong Pi behind the fence. Chang and Tsoo Kong, who had wonderingly participated in the eccentric burial, had already reentered the house. Confucius occasionally thought about Mong Pi, as the shepherd thinks of a straying lamb when a storm arises. He was sorry for him; he would have liked to guide him into the good life—which, of course, was his own.

Approaching the cripple, he directed upon him the entire force of his persuasive abilities. He was only too eager to do something for him. If Mong Pi would only promise to mend his ways, he would try to obtain for him an honorable position. He would endeavor to forget in what

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sort of company he had found him, in the Mountains of Lu. He would not even think of the violent deeds he must have committed. It is never too late to reform. He would forgive him from the bottom of his heart.

But apparently Mong Pi's mind was wandering. He was busy with thoughts of his own. He seemed to be thinking of the word "forgive." His eyes were moist.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I will forgive you, because you loved your dog enough to bury him as if he were a human being."

THE DEATH OF CONFUCIUS

SOME peasants who had slain a queer creature in the neighboring forest brought it to Confucius, who declared it to be a unicorn. When he examined the animal he perceived that there was a silken ribbon attached to its horn. This ribbon seemed to be very old. Confucius remembered that his mother had often told him how once when she was taking a solitary walk, a unicorn had come out of a thicket of junipers, and that she had tied a silk ribbon round its horn. Since these beasts, which are rare and very wild, are not ordinarily decorated with ribbons, Confucius decided that the unicorn which had just been killed was the same his mother had seen so long ago, and in this circumstance he saw a premonition of his approaching end.

But he was not frightened. He was seventy-three years old; he had never been afraid to die. The fact that death takes all men without exception, the quantity of ceremonies, genuflexions,

and rites, with which the ancient traditions had surrounded it, as well as its own essentially mysterious nature, had rendered death respectable. And this orderly scheme whereby all human beings were ultimately obliged to take their ease in tombs appeared to Confucius to be full of majesty.

He felt confident that Nature was too wise to afflict men, when they had ceased to live, with undeserved and secret sufferings. But he could not help thinking about the moment when his spirit, leaving its old familiar body, would perch upon a tablet in the hall of his ancestors. That night he was unable to sleep. At last, worn out from writhing in his bed, he got up and went down into the garden.

It was the eighteenth day of the fourth moon of the year Yen Sin, and the air was bluishly transparent. The stars seemed misty and very close together. The tall trees stood in perfect immobility. The softness of the atmosphere was such that leaves, branches, and the soil itself seemed made of velvet. Confucius observed that it would soon be daybreak, and he was seized with a mysterious desire to play the lute. He paid no attention to the fact that the hour was hardly

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suitable for music; he went straight to his room and got the instrument.

He wished to play the famous melody composed by the scholar Wen Wang, one of the first his teacher Siang had taught him when he was studying music. He played the opening bars. But presently he got off the track. Another tune took possession of his fingers in spite of him, and a sweet intoxication drowned his soul. He took a step or two, and the leaf of a rubber-plant brushed across his face like a green caress. He saw beside him on a branch a bird that looked at him without dismay. He might have touched it with his hand. Something winged and magical enveloped Confucius as he played upon the lute. He was improvising now, as easily as though he were sliding down a perfumed slope. A curtain lifted from before his eyes, so that he saw things which he had never seen before. Raising his head, he noticed for the first time the boundless sky with its innumerable stars.

He had never watched so great a miracle of color, never seen an ocean of such tender blue, such misty, fleeting clouds. Never before had he observed the harmonious order of the Great Bear, nor with what sadness the star Kiao, which

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is opposite the sun, sank down beneath the horizon when the fiery ball appeared. For the first time he was impressed by the eternal beauty of Tien Yi, unique among stars, whose unfailing luster is like the gaze of an eye that never winks.

How he loved the stars! He raised his arms toward them as a sign of adoration. He wanted to look at them forever. But one by one they disappeared. He strained his eyes to watch them as they faded out. The new day came with its inexorable regularity, and Confucius found himself longing with all his might for a delay, a rupture in the universal equilibrium, a solar phenomenon—anything that would permit him another hour of contemplation! He walked back slowly to the house. Ah, might the stars soon shine again! But he was nevermore to witness such a spectacle.

He mounted the stairs with difficulty. To his great surprise he met all sorts of personages who bowed to him obsequiously. He recognized them, although he had not seen them for many years. They were important officials, scholars, magistrates, and virtuous heads of families—all those whom he had loved, upon whom he had depended, and who had defended his ideas. Vast

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multitudes of them had invaded his chamber, and Confucius recognized many who had been dead a long time, at whose burials he had been present. All had sympathetic, grateful faces and were dressed in stately gowns. They seemed to be performing some ceremony, bowing again and again.

Confucius wanted to ask them whether they had looked at the sky and if they had seen the magic blues of the constellations, and the delicate jade-green blood of the two stars Sin and Tsan. But he did not dare. He perceived at once that these eyes of punctilious officials, the eyes rendered short-sighted by trifling tasks, filial pieties, and timid virtues, had never had strength enough to contemplate the great sky shot with the flame of stars. He said nothing, but went to bed.

Then there came more officials, more magistrates, more heads of families, whom he did not know; and he understood that they were still unborn, that they were his future disciples of the years to come. They all bowed to him, they all paid him homage, they all admired his doctrines; and all were equally incapable of looking at the sky. He was the master of these virtuous, short-sighted people. He looked above his head.

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The ceiling seemed to be lower than usual, strangely heavy; and on the ceiling were written the innumerable moral precepts which he had enunciated in the course of his life. How many saintly truths! What a quantity of good advice! But he wished they had not been there before his eyes. He would have exchanged them willingly for the tiniest bit of celestial blue. His precepts crawled, crossed, were multiplied; and it was his whole soul that Confucius contemplated in those rigorous, balanced, sensible texts which were to be the ethical guide of men.

He extended his arms to drive these images away. But the phantoms seemed to believe that Confucius was merely returning their salutation. And they crowded round him in the respectful attitudes of shaven-headed hacks. Thus it was, in the midst of ten thousand salutations, ten thousand ritual genuflexions, that Confucius entered the lethargy which he was to leave only through the gateway of death.

LÂO-TSZE DISAPPEARS

ONE evening, Lâo-tsze felt more lonely than usual, and he understood immediately that his disciple Siu Kia had died somewhere in the course of his travels. Lâo-tsze was so old that his legs would hardly support him. But his intelligence still developed, becoming keener and keener as his body became heavier and more inactive.

He had, one evening, an extraordinarily clear vision of a valley hemmed in by a circle of lofty mountains. Through the valley wound a peaceful river along whose banks grew lotus-flowers larger than any he had ever seen. And there were blocks of stone which looked like houses built one above another. They were sheltered by cedar-trees and surrounded by terraces strewn with white pebbles. The whole valley was enclosed by almost perpendicular mountain-walls, having no communication with the outside world except by means of a narrow trail accessible only to a man of great agility.

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A cedar, taller than the rest, stood in the middle of the valley, surrounded by a circular bench of carved stone, which was the only indication that the place was inhabited. An impression of serenity was diffused from this silent spot, causing Lâu-tsze to think that it must be the dwelling-place of those perfect men, guardians of lost wisdom and secret directors of the human race, whose existence had been made known to him by the old traditions.

"Into this valley will come my two brothers," said Lâu-tsze, "the man from India and the man from the country where there are marble temples at the edge of the blue sea. That is where I must go."

Now an ox, having escaped from its herd, had been wandering for some time in the wildest part of the garden which surrounded the Palace of Earth-Spirits. A friendship had sprung up between the ox and the philosopher; thus it was on the back of this mount that Lâu-tsze decided to undertake his journey.

He departed. He went toward the Hang Kow Pass, through which Siu Kia had gone out of China. He proceeded slowly, and everyone was astonished to see such a dignified old man riding

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along on the back of an ox toward the unknown regions of the earth.

His renown was great throughout the Empire, for wisdom filters into the minds of men through secret channels, and Truth, to be known, has no need of many words. Governors offered Lâu-tsze the hospitality of their palaces, and anchorites, who had been notified by the shepherds, came down from the mountains to see him pass. Lâu-tsze, accepting only a few grains of rice and a friendly word, continued on his way.

It was just before reaching the Hang Kow Pass that he slid off the back of his ox and lay unconscious on the ground while the animal stood by bellowing mournfully. The mandarin, In Hi, who commanded this part of the frontier, learned of his presence and came to fetch him with an escort. Bringing him into his palace, he cared for him with great solicitude. For he was a highly intelligent scholar, who knew and admired the philosophy of Lâu-tsze.

When the sage was well again, In Hi attempted to persuade him to abandon his journey. It was autumn. Beyond the Hang Kow Pass, where the Empire ended, stretched wild and lonely spaces. How could he cross these deserts? But

Lão-tsze's mind was made up. He would strive to reach Mount Kwen Lun, near which must be the mysterious valley of perfect men, and where there was a stone bench around the towering cedar-tree which was the goal of his journey.

To gain time and to let the winter pass, In Hi asked of Lão-tsze the favor of writing for him a summary of his doctrines. And it was to thank him for his hospitality that Lão-tsze set down in his book "The Way of Love" the essential truths that he had pondered during his life. But when the book was finished and when spring had come, Lão-tsze decided to resume his journey. He refused the body-guard which In Hi wished to give him. He refused also some horses which would have permitted him to traverse more rapidly the desert regions where travelers die in the sand from thirst and hallucinations. He preferred his faithful ox because of the friendship that was between them. It was at the Hang Kow Pass that living men saw Lão-tsze for the last time.

Always westward! The old man journeyed day after day beneath the burning sun, contenting himself at nightfall with a handful of rice and a draft of water. At length his rice gave out and his flasks ran dry. Dancing heat-waves and dron-

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ing vibrations made Lâu-tsze believe that he was walking over an immense mirror of gold, confined beneath a bell of light. The ox plodded on with faltering steps as though he had himself become an old man, till he dropped down in his tracks and died. Westward lay Mount Kwen Lun and the valley of the lotus-flowers by the peaceful river. Westward Lâu-tsze continued. At the end of a whole day's journey he still saw the body of the ox only a short distance away.

Lâu-tsze sat down on the sand to rest. The sun was sinking, but it had a blood-red color, and the sky was ashen, leaden, cruelly metallic. From the far horizon the wind brought whirling columns of sand like moving mountains. Lâu-tsze thought that they really were mountains and that probably Mount Kwen Lun was among them. He sighed because they were far away. And then, as night came on, he saw that the mountains were moving toward him and that two other travelers, struggling in the sand, were pointing to the highest summit of this moving chain. He recognized them easily. One of them came from India, and the other from the shore of the distant sea which he knew only by its color. They were his two spiritual brothers, come into the world

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to accomplish the same mission as himself. He called to them, surprised to find that he knew their names. Pythagoras, Buddha, and Lâu-tsze were united.

He got up. He felt strangely light. Night had closed in upon him from all directions, and great avalanches of sand were heaped above his body. His spirit, however, escaped. Lâu-tsze, the wise man of China, together with the sage of India and the sage of Greece, approached the secret valley where their equals awaited them, in the midst of the dazzling splendor of the spiritual universe.

THE END







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